

THE GRIM GAME

A Tiger Standish Story

BY

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TO
THE MEMBERS OF THE
RECENTLY FORMED
TIGER STANDISH CLUB

AUTHOR'S NOTE

Previous adventures of Tiger Standish will be found narrated in my books *Tiger Standish*, *Tiger Standish Comes Back* and *The Mystery of the Seven Cafés*.

S.H.

All characters in this novel are entirely imaginary and have no relation to any living person or persons.

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CHAPTER I

BACK TO THE JOB

THE distinguished orthopædic surgeon frowned.

"Keep still, can't you?"

"Damn it!" came the spluttering protest. "How can I keep still when you tickle so? . . . By the way, could anybody come in at that door?"

"Nobody would dare to come in."

"That's all right, then. Nice thing if that very attractive receptionist of yours caught me in my little short shirt. . . . By the way, Cross, did I ever tell you of a yarn I heard at school?"

With a despairing gesture the surgeon straightened his back and discontinued his task of examining the left knee belonging to the man who, nine short months before, had been the most famous centre-forward in England.

"You know I charge at the rate of a guinea a minute?" he warned.

"Charge what the hell you like! Just listen to this story: it was when I was at Repington. A chap who played outside-left was always developing synovitis—he collapsed on the field one afternoon—and when he was carted into the Head's study the school doctor, a fellow we called 'Moses,' because he seemed all snuff and whiskers, happened to be there.

"Let me look at it," he said, and so Thompson (that was the boy's name) had to take his trousers down and be deposited on the Head's desk. As it.

happened, the Head had married again—a very charming young blonde. . . . Interested?"

"I shall be far more interested in that knee when you have got through with your blather."

"Don't be impatient; it doesn't become you. And this is quite a good story. Now I'll proceed: young Thompson, blushing all over, was acutely conscious of the fact that (1) his shirt was somewhat inadequate, and (2) the Head's wife's was taking a great interest in the diagnosis. When Moses—he wasn't unlike you, Cross, old boy, except for the whiskers—got through with his job, he thought he'd play a small joke off on the kid.

"What do you think's the matter with your knee, young man?" he asked.

Thompson went a deeper beetroot—and in doing so got his ideas all mucked up.

"I think it's confusion of the knee, sir," he said."

Sir Lessington Cross, easily the best "bone" man in Harley Street, chuckled quietly.

"Glad you like it," was the comment. "And now, get on with the job, for heaven's sake!"

Ten minutes later the patient rose from the medical sofa and stood up. He made an attractive figure as he adjusted his braces. Tiger Standish, twelve stone ten pounds of muscular manhood, would have delighted the eye of a connoisseur of human thoroughbreds. Famous as a sportsman—before his left knee had conked out, he had led the celebrated Swifts, the crack professional football team of the Metropolis, to many a gallant victory—he was even more famous (but in this instance his prowess was confined to certain secret files) as a free-lance agent employed by that grey, grim man of mystery, Sir Harker Bellamy, Chief of Q.1 of British Intelligence.

Attractively ugly, Tiger left his mark on all whom he met—the right kind of men worshipped him, women adored him. Not that the latter affected him: there were no sideshows for Standish; his whole heart was centred on a certain young lady whom he put right at the top of her class: Sonia, his wife, had no rivals.

“ You’re looking damned serious,” he now said jestingly to the orthopædic surgeon. “ Oh, by the way, Cross, I forgot to tell you, I’m going to turn out for the Swifts on Saturday—”

“ Who told you? ” was the cold inquiry.

“ Who told me? Well, the chairman of the club for one thing. He rang me up this morning and fairly twittered with excitement. We’re playing Firfield, if you don’t happen to know—and I (see this wet, see this dry?) am going to get a couple of goals or you go without your cheque. So which is it to be? ”

Silence.

“ Come on, get it off your chest—how is this particular bit of gristle? ” flexing his left knee.

“ Personally—”

“ Am I to play or not? ” came the swift interruption. “ Farquhar, the club doctor, says that he sees no reason why I shouldn’t. And I have been a good boy, Crossie, I really have. I’ve not done a single thing for you to be annoyed about—I’ve been careful in stepping off the pavement, jumping on buses and especially when kicking my enemies in the pants.”

“ You’re incorrigible, Standish,” declared Sir Lessington Cross, unbending at last. “ Yes, you can play. That knee, provided you wear a Martin’s bandage, ought not to let you down.”

“ It doesn’t matter a damn about letting *me* down—it’s the Swifts I’m thinking about.”

" Well, your club, then."

Tiger's thanks might have taken an effusive form had not the door opened at that moment and the very attractive receptionist, mention of whom has been made before, entered.

" What is this young lady's name, Cross ? " asked the incorrigible one.

" Miss Leicester."

" Thank you. And the Christian name, please ? "

This time it was the girl who replied. It was a very case-hardened female who could ignore Tiger Standish's presence.

" Mary," she proffered, flushing most becomingly.

" Charming ! And now, Miss Mary Leicester, I'm going to give you a piece of remarkable intelligence.

... Would you mind coming forward a little, as I don't want to shout ? "

With a puzzled smile on her face the girl complied.

Standish looked at her earnestly.

" This is the piece of remarkable intelligence," he said : " at last a doctor has been found who really understands his job. Oh, yes, I know that this is very startling news, and frankly, I expected you to swoon with surprise—but I should like to congratulate you on the astonishing fact before I go. . . . I'll be sending the cheque along later, Cross," having by this time reached the door.

" What a remarkable man ! " ejaculated Mary Leicester when she was alone with the surgeon.

" Yes," conceded Cross, " he is remarkable "—and might have added more had not discretion closed his lips. The Harley Street specialist was one of the few men outside official circles who were aware of the extraordinary way in which Tiger Standish spent so much of his supposed leisure.

Running down the stairs that led to the hall, Tiger threw open the front door and bounded into the street. His entry into that sedate thoroughfare was greeted with an exclamation of joy on the part of a short, bow-legged man in immaculate chauffeur's uniform standing by the door of a primrose-coloured Bently sports car. Benny Bannister, once famous himself as an international centre-half, had joined Tiger's service some years before, and had shared many of his master's hair-raising adventures. The two, indeed, were so devoted that neither could have conceived the possibility of continuing existence without the other.

" 'Ow is it, guv'nor ? " asked Benny in a hoarse whisper.

For reply Tiger took an imaginary kick with his left foot at a non-existent football, and, narrowly missing the front wheel of a cyclist, apologised to the irate butcher's minion riding this steel steed by an elaborate raising of his hat.

" Pardon, señor," he said, bowing deeply.

It is not often that a London butcher's boy is at a loss for words, but this perfect piece of pantomime nonplussed Joe Binks. He said one word, and one word only : " Loopy ! "—and passed on, the front wheel of his steed wobbling more precariously than before.

Tiger Standish turned to his servant.

" I'm going to play on Saturday—the knee is O.K."

The homely features of Benny Bannister broke into a radiant grin.

" And won't I be there to watch yer, guv'nor ! " he reported fervently. . . . " Where now—home ? "

" No, not just yet, Benny ; drive to the ground."

" The boys won't 'arf be glad to see yer, guv'nor."

'Ow long is it now—nine months since you 'ad a game?"

"Over nine, Benny. . . . Step on it."

Benny Bannister had many accomplishments, but no gift had attained better efficiency than the ability to steer his master's Bently through the crowded London traffic. Whilst policemen frowned and other motorists gasped, the primrose Bently went its flashing way—easily the snappiest car that the November shopping crowd had gazed upon that morning.

Within twenty minutes it drew up outside the entrance to the famous Swifts ground. The gate-keeper, recognising it, came out as though receiving royalty.

A shout of enthusiasm was given by the Swifts players when they saw their old-time leader. With Tiger welding the cleverest forward line in England, the Swifts the year before had climbed to the leading place in the First Division table. What was more, in the competent opinion of Jim Bradley, the over-weight manager of the club, who looked (but only when in a good mood) like a superabundant Father Christmas shorn of his beard, they would probably have won the English cup as well. But, alas! just when the outlook seemed so promising, a malignant fate decided that the most dangerous forward in football should be crocked. Bradley did not know the story behind that unfortunate occurrence, and Tiger, bound by a sense of loyalty to keep the secrets of Q.I., had not enlightened him. It was sufficient that the injured knee was now declared sound and that Tiger could take his rightful place as leader of the pack against Firfield in three days' time.

Bradley held out a fist that looked like a bunch of overgrown bananas when he saw Standish.

"Welcome home, Tiger!" he said. "Jes' 'ark at the boys."

The other Swifts players were not content to voice their enthusiasm: they crowded round their hero, anxious to demonstrate once again the affection they bore him. For, unlike the stories written by minor fictionists to the effect that the modern professional football player is jealous of an amateur's playing alongside him, the Swifts, one and all, had been looking forward eagerly to the day when Standish could rejoin their ranks.

"All right, you chaps," said Tiger, "give me a chance to change."

Within a few minutes he was out on the field as happy as a school kid on holiday. Once he had tested his knee by taking several rasping shots, he felt that he would not have changed places with any one in the wide, wide world. A run round the ground, some heading practice, another sprint—this time a hundred yards effort—and he strolled back to the changing room, his only regret being that Saturday was three days ahead.

CHAPTER II

THE HIDDEN SPY

TIGER went home to lunch with a light heart. Although he had endeavoured to be patient, his enforced absence from the football field had left him with a gnawing sense of irritability. Golf had proved ~~but~~ a poor substitute ; his handicap at this perplexing and annoying game, according to his own estimate, was round about $57\frac{1}{2}$! And the fact that

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Sonia played down to a safe 4 was not consoling to his pride, however much he rejoiced at her skill.

Entering the new house in Chester Street, he was greeted with a loud "*Miaou!*" and there, racing towards him, came Richard the Lion, his magnificent half-Persian cat, whose general intelligence he rated far above that of the ordinary human being.

Dick, his splendid tail sweeping imperiously from side to side, gave one bound and landed on his shoulder. There he occupied himself by rubbing his cheek against that of his idolised master.

"Hallo, Richard, you old scoundrel!" greeted Tiger. "Where's the missus?"

"*Miaou!*"

"Oh, she's out! Naughty girl, isn't she, old man, not to be here to receive us?"

"Who's that calling me a 'naughty girl'?" asked a clear, vibrant voice. "Oh, Tiger, darling, I *am* glad to see you back." A pair of arms was outstretched and the eight stone two pounds of loveliness, as her still infatuated husband so often styled her, was caught up in a grip that momentarily robbed her of breath.

"And why are you so glad to see me back, Sunshine?" Tiger questioned, his eyes taking in every feature of her dear face. "Answer promptly and without any quibbles, please!"

Sonia shook her head.

"I just had a feeling that something might happen to you to-day."

"Something *has* happened, sweetheart—I'm going to play centre-forward for the Swifts on Saturday."

"*Tiger!*"

"Yes, even Cross has said that there's nothing much wrong with this old bit of gristle now—and if he says so, you can bet your sweet life on its being a

fact. Aren't you going to congratulate me, child?"

"Of course, darling." She kissed him.

They went into lunch arm-in-arm. Affection such as existed between these two never ceased to be a source of conversation with their friends. In this degenerate age, when it is considered the right thing for husband and wife each to go separate ways, the blessed bond of comradeship that bound Sonia and Tiger together was as refreshing as it was novel.

They were the perfect pals.

Yet Sonia had just the smallest little devil's doubt in her heart. She would have gone to the stake rather than admit it, but she was the slightest bit jealous of Tiger's returning to the football field. She could not forget that it was whilst playing on the Swifts' ground that he had met with that accident which might have crippled him for ever. And then, those tens of thousands of people chanting his name. . . . Loving him as she did, wasn't it only natural that she should want him entirely to herself?

Her silence did not go unnoticed.

"What's the matter, chicken?" asked her husband, who was never at a loss for a pet name.

"Oh, nothing, darling. I was only thinking."

"Thinking about—what?"

Before she could reply, the butler had brought him a telegram on a salver. Tiger tore open the orange envelope, and, after reading the contents, flung it high in the air with a boyish shout.

"FAME!" he cried.

Sonia, motioning to the servant, read the wire herself:

"Selecting you centre-forward in English team against France at Paris fortnight next Sunday please reply Secretary Football Association."

Sonia spoke on the impulse of the moment.

" Oh, my dear, *don't* go ! "

He stared. This was not like Sonia.

She, in turn, looked at the butler.

" It's all right, Matthews ; you needn't wait."

" *Very* good, madame."

When they were alone, Sonia explained.

" Darling, you will think it very foolish of me, ~~but~~ ever since I woke up this morning I have had a presentiment that something was going to happen. That was why I was so glad to see you back."

He came over to her chair.

" But that's all hooey, lovely one," he returned. " What *could* happen to me ? " Then, as though a thought had come to him out of the blue : " You haven't been thinking of the old days, surely ? Rahusen is dead—I killed him with these two little hands," showing a pair of outsizes in fists.

" Oh, *don't*, darling ! " She shuddered. " I *was* thinking of Rahusen," she admitted a moment later.

" But he's pushed off—gone out—snuffed it—and all the rest of it. Don't trouble your sweet head over such rubbish. I'm alive and well, aren't I. Feel this muscle," humorously flexing a biceps.

" Darling," said his wife, " I can't help thinking that this is some trick to get you away from me. Oh, I know you can look after yourself—you've proved it so many times—but, well," she weakly concluded, " it may be stupid, but there it is."

Tiger was very patient with her. God only knew, he reflected, that Sonia had good reason for being nervous concerning his safety. Twice in the past they had faced—and overcome—the most appalling risks when waging a bitter war with their enemies, at the head of whom was Rahusen, the Man with the

Dead Face.¹ But now Rahusen was dead—killed, as Tiger had said, months before, by Standish's own hands. Of course, the Ronstadtian Government, by whom Rahusen had been employed, did not bear the British Secret Service agent any good will—but England was England, and Ronstadt was Ronstadt. At the moment he happened to be in England.

Yet he was able to see the drift of Sonia's reasoning.

But he had to reassure her. Reassure her on several counts—one, because he wanted to banish this bogey from her mind for ever; two, because the glory of representing his country at football was an honour not lightly to be put aside; and three, because, although essentially the most modest of men, Tiger yet knew that fit and well, he was, he supposed, the best possible choice to lead the English forward line.

Besides, a trip to Paris was not to be sneezed at.

"If you like, darling, you shall come with me," he said.

This item of intelligence rallied her.

"Oh, my dear, that would be marvellous," she returned.

"All settled now?"

"Yes; it was silly of me, I suppose."

The meal was continued. But not for long. This seemed Tiger's morning for being interrupted. Just before the cheese and biscuits had been put on the table, the telephone rang.

"Now, who can that be?" asked Sonia in a tone of annoyance. The next second her face had paled; in the past, telephone messages had been too often a sinister feature of their lives.

She watched her husband rise from his chair, cross the room, and reach out for the receiver.

¹ *Tiger Standish and Tiger Standish Comes Back.*

" Hallo ! " he drawled lazily.

The next moment his face had become taut. His body stiffened ; he looked like an athlete who was about to run a race.

" O.K.," he said quickly, and rang off.

" Who was it, Tiger ? "

" Bellamy," was the answer, short and swift.

" I knew that something was going to happen to-day. What does he want ? "

" He wants to see me immediately," was the answer.

" Are you going ? "

" My dear, I must. You know that."

" Yes, but . . . Ah, Tiger, when are we going to be able to live our own lives ? "

He was still very patient with her.

" Once upon a time," he started, " there was a certain lovely little-lady. Her name was Sonia. She got into great trouble . . . remember ? "

He had no need to say any more.

" I'm being a selfish beast," she admitted—

" but don't go before you drink your coffee."

Sir Harker Bellamy, C.M.G., D.S.Q., who, prettily on account of his appearance, but principally on account of his occupation, was designated " The Mole," reached out for a battered tobacco tin and filled an insanitary pipe with an unholy-looking mixture.

" Yes, Standish," he said, " however unflattering it is to your personal pride—and, as you know, I don't care a damn about that—the fact remains it was at my suggestion that you were invited to represent England at Association Football in Paris a fortnight next Sunday. There is a reason."

" I might have known it," remarked his caller

sarcastically. "At lunch Sonia put the modest question to me, 'When are we going to be allowed to live our own lives ?' Perhaps you can give me the answer, Bellamy ? "

"Not yet," was the curt retort. "I've got a job of work for you, my lad ; that's why I picked you to play centre-forward in the English team."

"You picked me ? "

"If you don't believe me, ask Rowdell, Secretary of the Football Association."

Tiger, who knew his man, and who knew, moreover, that it was perfectly useless to attempt to kick against the official pricks, took out his own pipe.

"Shoot ! " he said.

The grim features of the Intelligence chief relaxed a little.

"Now you're being sensible," he said. "For the next ten minutes I don't want you to interrupt me."

Tiger piped a stave.

"Tell me your tale-o ! "

But the smile soon vanished from his face. The story which Bellamy had to tell him was serious in the extreme. Many times in the past Tiger had listened to statements which, if they had been allowed to escape into the outside world from that small, littered room, would have caused every front page in London to erupt sensational headlines. But never had he listened to a graver topic than the one Bellamy was discussing now.

The gist of the situation, as he had outlined it at length, could be summed up as follows : a conference of European Secret Service chiefs, meeting to discuss tactics in case Ronstadt—rightly called the mad dog of Europe, now that she had given herself wholly

up to the dictatorship of Kuhnreich—declared war, had been called to meet in Paris in seventeen days' time,

“That's why I'm going there to play football, I take it?” grinned Tiger.

“You are going to Paris, Standish,” said Bellamy seriously, “to represent me and Q.I. I can't go myself because I'm too well known. There are other reasons into which I don't intend to enter at the moment: It's a great responsibility—I want you to realise that.”

“I do.”

“And you will undertake it?”

“There doesn't seem to be much choice. Oh, yes, I'll carry on, sir.”

“The Mole” rose and put his hand on the younger man's shoulder.

“I knew you would not fail me,” he said—and for once there was a certain kindness in his tone.

“More details later. Run away now: I'm busy.”

It was just at the moment when his caller was taking his leave that Bellamy launched his thunderbolt.

“I don't think I'd better say any more at the moment, Standish,” he remarked, in what might have appeared to the ordinary person to be a casual tone. “The truth is that we have a spy here.”

Standish broke into a roar of laughter.

“A spy in Q.I.? ” he retorted. “My God, that's rich!”

“Nevertheless, it is the truth—so watch your step.”

“The Mole” turned back to his desk, and in spite of Tiger's earnest entreaty refused to say another word.

CHAPTER III*

TIGER GOES ALL GALLANT AND CHASES A WIG

TIGER emerged into Whitehall, whistling. He possessed that peculiarity: whenever the bright eyes of danger beckoned—and it looked an odds-on chance that they would be glancing in his direction very soon—his lips instinctively became puckered and a more or less unmelodious tune issued from them.

It was this habit of Tiger's to whistle when his immediate surroundings became somewhat prickly with hazard that had endeared him to so many of his fellows. He strode on, thinking: if Bellamy's words were true—and who was he to doubt them?—the present moment might be decidedly sticky.

A spy in Q.1! He ran rapidly over the names he could remember, but was unable to put a finger on the likely suspect. All the older men who worked under Sir Harker Bellamy had been with him for a number of years; their credentials in the first place had been unquestionable; whilst Bellamy, for all his taskmaster methods, inspired a loyalty that many men had carried with them to their graves.

Something exceptional must have occurred in Q.1 to have caused this amazing and despicable treachery.

From this point he went on to review the past. Rahusen was dead—there could be no question about that—but he had left others to carry on without a doubt. In that respect, Sonia, who possessed in a remarkable degree the feminine intuitive sense, had doubtless been right.

Voltag!

That must be the fellow. From that last hectic affray in the underground hideaway at the back of Baker Street,¹ Voltag, the chief spy of Ronstadt in England, had escaped ; that was why he was still at large.

It was absolutely on the cards, of course, that friend Voltag would try to do the Napoleon-stuff in this fresh battle of wits that, according to "The Mole," was due to begin. Not only would he be anxious to please his No. 1—Kuhnreich—but he would be wanting to burnish up some of the laurels that had become slightly dusty in the previous two rounds ; whilst, as a final incentive, being a proud man, he would want to get the half-nelson on the man who so far had played the winning cards.

Altogether quite a promising outlook.

By the time he had reached this conclusion, Tiger had arrived at the entrance to the Admiralty. It was whilst he was passing the gates that he noticed a woman regarding him intently. She was not a beautiful woman, and even if she had been blessed with the sex-allure of a modern Cleopatra, it is doubtful if Tiger would have given her a second thought.

Yet, in the very next second, circumstances compelled him to concentrate attention on this female. For the most amazing and extraordinary thing occurred : a sudden gust of wind, sweeping down Whitehall from Trafalgar Square, had, in some curious manner, got entangled with the woman's hat and hair. The latter did not appear to be the genuine article. . . . Whilst Standish stood gaping, like any yokel watching the changing of the Guard for the first time, this frolicsome imp of a wind

¹ *Tiger Standish Comes Back.*

caught the wig and hat that the woman had been wearing and sent both careering madly down the street !

Tiger was nothing if not gallant. Distressed beyond measure at this ludicrous if poignant *contretemps*, he gave chase and, like a cricketer fielding on the boundary, stooped, caught the hat in one hand and the wig in the other and brought them back, retriever-fashion, presenting them to the discomfited owner.

" Hallo, Voltag ! " he said to the man whose disguise had been so dramatically disclosed. " Well met, and what not ! As a matter of fact, I was just thinking about you. How are tricks ? "

The Ronstadtian chief agent flushed under his grotesque make-up.

" I am not aware I know you, sir," he said in a tone that made Standish put his hands on his hips and roar with gargantuan laughter.

" Have it your own way, me boy—but listen: if you're keeping tag on this child, watch your step ! I'm suffering from indigestion these days and I'm apt to be peevish. Remember Rahusen ; and whilst I do not wish to boast, give also a passing thought to poor Aubrey Hamme. You remember Ye Merrie Hammebone, don't you, as well as your Wop pal, Carlimero ? "

With as much dignity as was possible, the discomfited one replaced wig and hat and, hopping across the pavement, got into a taxi, the driver of which had shown professional acumen by drawing up to the kerb. The next moment Standish was alone. Alone to all intents and purposes, that was, although there were roughly five hundred people looking at him with some degree of amazement.

At that moment, several hundreds of miles away, Kuhnreich, the all-powerful Dictator of Rönstadt, was interviewing a man who had intimated that he wished to join his service. Kuhnreich, heavily built, scowling of face, relentless of purpose—those critics who called him a monomaniac were not too far wrong—sat at a wide mahogany desk in his enormous study in the Chancellery at Pé, listening to what his visitor had to say.

The caller was a rat of a man—well-tailored, slim of figure, with a certain polish in manner, and yet stamped with the unmistakable mark of those who dwell in the underworld and live by its methods. "Coke" Mahon had been a distinguished figure in Chicago criminal circles until the latest clean-up by an outraged municipality had caused him to cross the seas. After one or two profitable killings in Paris, he had wandered round until one night found him in a beer-hall in Manke. Having sharp ears, he had listened intently to the conversation that had been proceeding at an adjoining table—and at the end of the talk he had risen and joined the group.

Into what devious means Crosber, Chief of the Secret Police at Pé, had used to learn of the whereabouts of this accomplished professional assassin, it is profitless to inquire—but it was as a direct result of his meeting Mahon that the latter was now closeted with the man who ruled something like eighty million people with an iron hand.

The talk had been proceeding for about ten minutes. During this time Mahon had presented his credentials and these had been approved.

Kuhnreich now spoke.

"I want you to go to London," he said, "and give me a practical demonstration that you can accomplish what you say. These are the names of the

two men I want removed. You will be paid five hundred pounds down and another five hundred when I have irrefutable proof that these two men are dead."

"That's O.K. with me," remarked Mahon, rising and smoothing the left lapel of his irreproachably cut coat.

"You understand that you will receive no direct assistance—but if you are in any great trouble, you can apply to the man whose name and address you will find on this slip of paper. Read it, memorise it, and then destroy it."

The interview was over.

CHAPTER IV

THE MURDERED AGENTS

SIR HARKER BELLAMY became a very busy man after Tiger Standish had left his room. He had even more than usual to ponder over.

There was, for instance, this annoying and mysterious business of the five murdered agents. If Bellamy had ever allowed himself to become worried, he would have been worried now.

Losses in the grim game he played, during which he moved men like pawns across the gigantic chessboard of modern troubled Europe, were to be expected; but to lose five valuable agents, and all within the short space of a fortnight, was outside the ordinary laws of chance and misadventure. A concentrated effort to decimate his staff must have been planned. By whom? There could be little doubt: across the seas, Kuhnreich, the Dictator of Ronstadt, still, as in the past, England's most

mortal enemy, was spinning a giant spider's web—and it was up to him to smash the organisation his foe had built up—quickly and ruthlessly.

The discreet buzzing of the telephone brought him out of his deep brooding.

"Yes?" he asked curtly.

The voice of his assistant secretary, young Victor Lancing, answered.

"Sir Horace Woking has called—would you like to see him, sir?"

Woking! It was not often that the Permanent Under-Secretary for Foreign Affairs left his own room overlooking the Horse Guards Parade—but when he did, it meant trouble for some one. He felt like a scrap this afternoon, however—and he didn't care a damn who his opponent might be.

"Yes—I'll see Sir Horace immediately."

The man who entered the room a couple of minutes later would have deceived any one but a skilled psychologist. Sir Horace Woking, who had held his responsible post for the last twenty years, appeared totally undistinguished in appearance—he might have been a suburban draper—until one had been in his presence for several minutes. Then it gradually dawned on the observer that this paunchy, insignificant-looking man with the drooping moustache and the pince-nez that sat askew on a bulbous nose, was a personality. To be more explicit, Sir Horace Woking was acknowledged to be the most distinguished civil servant of his generation. He had a genius for his extremely difficult job.

These two were old enemies—and the best of friends. It was part of Woking's deliberate policy to pooh-pooh the hush-hush work of the chief of Q.I.; although in his heart he knew that Bellamy, in his own line, was a master.

"The Mole" did not stand on ceremony.

"What's the matter with you, Sour-belly?" he asked when Woking had ambled into the room and deposited his plump body, with a wheeze, into the nearest chair.

"Good-afternoon, Frog-face," was the amiable retort. "Well, I'll tell you what's the matter: the Old Man is bothered about your report. He thinks that it's criminally negligent of Q.1 to lose so many good men within such a space of time."

"I wish to God I could lose *him*!" retorted Bellamy, flinging a match into the grate.

"Yes, yes, Frog-face," rejoined the caller; "but that won't get us anywhere, I am afraid. Lord Chattaway," referring to the Foreign Secretary, "is particularly anxious to be informed when this present alarming rate of mortality amongst the Secret Service can be stopped."

"Tell him to go and eat his hat—and I hope it chokes him."

Woking coughed. Then he put a hand into the inside pocket of his tail coat and drew out a paper.

"Correct me if I am wrong in any detail," he said, smoothing the document. "Now, according to your report, Bellamy, the following Intelligence agents have all been murdered. Of course, to the public, these assassinations merely represent a number of fatal accidents, but we are not dealing with the public: we are dealing with an important State Department."

He coughed again.

"Now I will read out the list. One—Hardy, No. 214 YB. According to the newspaper reports which told of the accident, he fell from a train in the Dover tunnel. Am I correct?"

Bellamy nodded.

Two—the elimination of Whittingham, No. 413 X, is supposed—and again I quote the newspaper reports—to have been due to cramp whilst bathing in the sea off Folkestone. Correct ? ”

“ Get on with it, and don’t ask me dam’ fool questions,” snapped “ The Mole.”

“ Number three,” continued the Permanent Under-Secretary in an imperturbable voice, “ deals with a supposed shooting accident on the South Downs. The unfortunate man in question had his face blown away and died from terrible injuries. Correct ? ”

“ Oh, get to hell out of here ! ”

“ Number four,” continued the speaker, “ records a sad boating accident in the Solent. An elderly clerk named Pittacre is presumed to have been swept away by a current—are there any currents in the Solent ? ”

“ Go down and see for yourself.”

“ Number five—and the last—deals with a middle-aged man who was found hanged in a Ramsgate garage. ‘ Was it suicide ? ’ runs the heading. Well, Bellamy, you ought to know.”

“ It’s damned easy to treat the matter as you and Chattaway are doing,” summed up Bellamy with asperity. “ But you know as well as I do, Woking, that these deaths—and God only knows how I regret them—represent a big concerted effort on the part of Ronstadtian espionage agents in this country to wipe out the best men in my department.”

“ I quite agree.”

“ But it’s not going on,” retorted the chief of Q.I. “ I’m making my own plans. . . . Excuse me just a minute, will you ? —I want—” The words faded away as Bellamy rose quickly and walked to the door. This he closed behind him, so that the curious Woking was not able to hear what was said.

"Oh, Lancing!" called the chief of Q.I.

A good-looking youngster, with British public school stamped all over him, turned in the corridor and looked at his superior in a rather confused fashion.

"Do you want me, Sir Harker?" he inquired.

"Yes, Fetch me the Z.e.b. file, will you, please? And—just a minute. Come here: I don't want to shout this."

When the young man had approached to within a yard of him, Bellamy reached out and patted the boy in kindly fashion on the shoulder.

"I'm afraid I've been working you too hard, Victor," he said, "so I'm going to send you away for a few days. A little holiday will do you a lot of good—you're looking fagged."

The young man appeared crestfallen.

"I don't want to take a holiday now, sir—especially as the department is so busy."

"But you must," insisted "The Mole." "What would your father, the general, say if anything happened to you? Now, fetch me the file and don't argue. I'll give you leave of absence from to-night for ten days. That's all; you needn't stop to thank me."

Back in his room, Bellamy sat down heavily. He looked like a man who had suddenly become weary.

"It seems to me that there must be some treachery going on—are you sure of everybody in Q.I?" suddenly inquired Woking.

"The Mole" stared at him.

"That's a dam' nice thing to say, Sour-belly!" he exclaimed. "What do you think this place is?"

The other persisted.

"I'm being perfectly serious. The theory was

advanced to me this morning by the Old Man, and I am more than inclined to put some belief in it. If I were you, Bellamy, I'd run a fine-tooth comb over every one in this building."

"I've already done that."

"With what result?"

"Oh, go and fry your face!" was the rude rejoinder.

"Now, about this Paris business," branched off Woking. "What arrangements are you making?"

"That's soon told. I'm sending Standish."

"Old Quorn's boy?"

"Yes. . . . I could tell you stories about Tiger Standish," went on "The Mole" with surprising warmth, "that would make your hair stand on end—provided you had any left."

"You needn't be offensive. But why Standish? Why aren't you going yourself?"

"Because I've other fish to fry. And let me tell you, Woking, that I couldn't send a better man. Besides, Standish has got a very useful alibi: he's supposed to be going to Paris—and here I quote the papers you're so fond of thrusting in my face—to play football for the English team against France."

"Then how can he attend the conference?"

"He'll attend it all right. Anything more to say?"

"Not at the moment."

"Then I suggest you get back to your talkative friend. Good-bye, and"—he coughed—"bless you!"

Sir Horace Woking went his way.

CHAPTER V

THE VITRIOL LORRY

ON his way home Tiger acted with a certain circumspection. Voltag may have had some of his agents watching that strange scene and, in the special circumstances, he felt he could not take any risks. But he arrived at Chester Street fairly confident that he had not been shadowed.

Sonia met him in the hall.

"This is terrible luck, old man," she complained.

"What's terrible luck?"

For reply, she passed him a telegram.

He read :

"Your Aunt Margaret seriously ill. Advise you come immediately."

It was signed, "Dr. Hartigan."

"Well," summed up Standish, "I don't see there's anything you can do, my dear, except buzz off to Worcester. I've never been in Worcester myself—but no doubt you'll survive the ordeal."

"Do you mind, darling?"

"Mind? Of course not. This Aunt Margaret is your only living relative, isn't she? It's a good cause. Dick and I will have to manage somehow—won't we, rascal?"

Richard the Lion, who was never far away when Tiger's voice was audible, whisked his magnificent tail and reared himself on his hind legs in an invitation to be picked up. Hugging him tightly, Tiger patted his wife on the shoulder.

"Have you packed?"

"Isabel is doing it now."

Ten minutes later the car was ready with Benny Bannister at the wheel.

Lighting a pipe, Tiger decided that some misfortunes had their consoling features. This unexpected, if alarming, illness of Sonia's aunt, for instance; in the stress of the departure, his wife had forgotten to question him about his visit to Bellamy, which was all to the good. Poor kid, she had suffered sufficiently in the past through his sessions with "The Mole."

He chuckled as he lolled in that comfortable leather chair. How friend Voltag must be hating him at this very moment! That hadn't been a bad stunt, dressing up as a woman, but the *dénouement* must have proved very galling to a bloke with Voltag's proud spirit. He wondered if he had sent a cablegram off to Kuhnreich. . . .

Then, because his was the temperament that could not be long idle, he rang for Benny.

"Come on, my lad," he said crisply, "I've been slack too long; we'll have a few rounds with the gloves."

Bannister, who, not so many years before, had been a more than useful middle-weight boxer, grinned in approval.

"Right y're, guv'nor—I'll be ready in ten minutes."

Sweating freely with the exercise, Tiger, half an hour later, ran upstairs, stripped, took a tepid bath, turned on the cold shower and gave his supremely fit body a rough towelling.

"And now—what?" he asked himself. The tocsin having sounded, action of some kind or

another was imperative ; he could not stay in the house cooling his heels.

What about going down to Whitehall again and giving Bellamy the shock of his life ? "The Mole" would think he was pulling his leg when he told him about Voltag—well, so much the better !

But when he arrived at the Q.1 office, he drew a blank.

"I'm afraid Sir Harker is out, Mr. Standish," announced young Lancing.

"Out, eh ? Well, that's not so good. I say, young feller-me-lad," taking a peep at "The Mole's" assistant secretary, "what's the matter with you these days ? You look as though you want an hour's squash with a good pro. and a two miles' swim afterwards."

The young man coloured.

"Why do you say that, Mr. Standish ? "

"Why do I say it ? Because you're looking like death—or a close relative to it. Anything wrong ? "

"No." The reply was curt.

"Not hitting the high spots too often, are you ?—or frolicking with too many lovelies ? I know the temptations, my lad—who better ?—but if I'm right in my guess, cut it out. It leads nowhere—except to bad trouble."

The other flushed a deeper hue.

"Thanks," he said abruptly, "but I know how to manage my own affairs."

"Glad to hear it. But cut it out all the same. Papa Standish is telling you. Seen your father lately?"

"Not lately."

"That's a pity. I think I'll run over to the War Office and have a word with him."

"What do you want to see him about ? " The boy was plainly nervous.

Tiger whistled under his breath. There was something wrong here—what was it?

"All right, young 'un," he replied with an indifference that was full of guile, "I won't rag you any more."

"Is there any message for Sir Harker?"

"No. Tell him I'll see him to-morrow."

Lancing murmured a perfunctory commonplace to his farewell.

Once in the street, Standish did some deep thinking. That kid was worried about something—what could it be? Not—? Oh, impossible, of course. The son of a British general . . . ! And yet, an equally strange thing had happened only three months before. A young subaltern in a famous regiment had come the most unholy cropper through what might be the same reason—a woman—and was now eating his heart out in prison. Hell! what a story that had made for the newspapers!

Well, for the sake of his father, he'd like to put his surmises to the test, and with this object in view hailed a taxi.

The Hon. Mornington Cass pursued what, to many men who had once been his friends, was a strange line of country. Pressed for money, he had placed himself at the service of a sensation-loving newspaper, for which he now acted in the capacity of gossip-writer. Aided by his own high family connections, and blessed (or cursed, according to the way one looked at it) by a fixed determination to get all ~~the~~ news that was printable—and a good deal that wasn't—he had achieved a great success in his new rôle of journalistic lounge-lizard.

Tiger, it must be confessed, harboured the most profound contempt for the Hon. Mornington, but he

recognised that such a fellow had his uses—at times. This seemed to be one of the times.

A few judicious inquiries in the vicinity of the fair parish of St. James's enabled him to run his man to earth in a certain Jermyn Street bar.

He wasted no words.

"I want to see you, Cass," he announced—and lugged the scribbler out of the place by the simple expedient of catching hold of his coat collar.

It was not until they were seated in a secluded corner of one of Tiger's own clubs—the Junior Sportsman—that Standish opened his heart.

"I want to know if you've heard any stories about young Lancing lately," he started, "but before we go any further, let me warn you that this is absolutely confidential and that you've got to keep it strictly under your hat. If you don't, somebody will be writing your obituary notice, Cass, so don't let there be any blooming error."

A thin film of perspiration showed on the gossip-writer's not too lofty brow. Mornington Cass looked vaguely gone-to-seed—for one thing, he was much too fat for a man of his age, whilst, for another, his new mode of life had given him a perpetual furtive expression, as though he were constantly debating the problem what could and what could not be done without the threat of physical chastisement.

"Lancing?" he repeated. "Whom do you mean?"

"You know whom I mean—young Lancing, the son of General Lancing at the War Office. Is he running around with anybody—if so, what's her name?"

Cass sniggered.

"What's the big idea, Standish?" he countered. "Have you taken on a wet-nurse job?"

"Never mind what I've taken on—answer my question. Is young Lancing making a fool of himself over any woman?"

"How the hell do you expect me to know?"

"You go everywhere, you see everybody—you poke that infernally ugly nose of yours into all sorts of things that don't concern you." He pulled himself up. This was no good; he was losing his temper. "I'm serious, Cass," he said in a different tone.

"Well, I'm afraid I can't help you," sniggered the other. "I know what fellows like you think of me because I've taken on this newspaper job, but let me say that I'm not a repository of all kinds of scandal and intrigue, if you think I am. . . . Sorry, but I have an appointment," looking at his watch.

Standish let him go. No power, except that of physical persuasion perhaps, would have induced the other to talk—*however much he knew*. And that he did know something was fairly evident: that snigger had proved as much.

Well, he'd have to keep a personal eye on Lancing, that was all. Now that Sonia was away, he could spend a little time at night doing the West End, and if he *did* discover anything he'd give the young fool hell and Maria!

As he continued to walk down Pall Mall, the extraordinary words of Sir Harker Bellamy returned once again:

"There is a spy in this office."

"The Mole," as he had the best of reasons for knowing, was the last man in the world to say such a thing without due and proper cause. Of course, it was inconceivable that Lancing could have acted with deliberate treachery—but when a young boy was got hold of by an unscrupulous woman. . . .

He stopped to light a cigarette. That would be a cunning move of Voltag and his master, Kuhnreich—to seduce some one in the close confidence of Bellamy.

But who was the woman? If his fears were based on anything like truth, there must be a woman in the background.

And he would have to find her.

Occupied with this thought, he continued on his way. At the bottom of Lower Regent Street he was jerked out of his meditations, first by the sound of a tremendous collision, and then by a number of frenzied screams that tore at his nerves. Turning quickly, he was not able to decide immediately what had happened—beyond the fact that a lorry heavily laden with carboys of some sort had collided with a bus.

It was the continued screams of a number of men and women, who, their hands to their faces, were rushing about as though they had been driven mad by pain, that caused him to stare perplexedly.

Then a voice explained the puzzle in a few words of extraordinary drama.

"Those carboys," stated this man, pointing to the smashed remains of three on the pavement a dozen yards away, "contain *vitriol*. . . . Oh, my God!"

It was a sight that Standish, used as he was to witnessing the bizarre and the fearful, felt he would never forget. Such a spectacle of raw, bleeding horror had not been seen in London since the air raids of the Great War. Waiting until the ambulances from Charing Cross Hospital arrived—and it was only a matter of a few minutes before these were on the scene—he turned away, feeling sick and stunned.

A man brushed against his shoulder.

"*Pardon, monsieur!*" he said, and launched into rapid French.

Tiger, who had a good knowledge of the Gallic tongue, replied in duty bound. The courtesy of this visitor from across the channel struck a chord in his heart.

But it was not until he reached the Carlton Hotel and suddenly bethought himself of something that he had cause to revise his opinion. Then he did so with a vengeance; his wallet had gone! That talkative Frenchy had picked his pocket!

"Well, I'll be damned!" he said, loudly enough for the expensively attired commissionaire of that exclusive caravanserai to overhear.

"Can I do anything, sir?" the flunkey solicitously inquired.

"No—I'll do it myself."

"Yes, sir."

"I'm just off now to boil my head."

"Yes, sir."

You can't astonish a Carlton Hotel commissionaire.

CHAPTER VI

RED HARVEST

THAT vitriol business. Nasty! Was it possible . . . ? Yes, hang it; so many apparently impossible things had proved possible in his experience. If several splashes of that sulphuric acid, concentrated strength, had fallen on him. . . . 'Oh, well, he didn't like to think of it.

He wasn't *going* to think of it. But all the same he'd give a ~~tenner~~ to be able to put his hand on that very courteous Frenchman!

Suddenly Tiger stiffened like a hound on the scent. On the opposite side of Regent Street, walking past the Dorland Advertising Agency's elaborate offices, he caught sight of some one he knew.

Young Lancing.

Crossing the road in a manner that would have won the envy of a rugby three-quarter back, he followed the assistant secretary of Sir Harker Bellamy until Lancing reached Piccadilly.

Pausing outside the Beaumont, Lancing took a swift glance to left and right (Tiger had adopted the precaution of stepping into an adjacent doorway) and then, with the nervous speed of a rabbit seeking its hole, had dived into the Grill.

Standish emerged, looking thoughtful. He didn't care for the appearance of things one little bit. And when, a few minutes later, screened from view by a huge pillar, he saw a very beauteous damsel indeed rise from a chair and give young Lancing cordial greeting, he liked the prospect still less.

Elsa Brendt was a famous figure in modern

espionage—and some said she was now working for Ronstadt.

Yet again acting up to his principle of speedy action, he strode forward, ignored the look of terror in Lancing's eyes and smiled radiantly at the beautiful blonde.

" Hallo, Elsa, darling—how are tricks ? "

She scowled at him.

" I'm afraid I haven't the pleasure—introduce me, Victor, will you ? "

Young Lancing stood up ; he was shaking.

" Miss Brendt—Mr. Standish." The words were faltering.

" I'm always busy—and it happens that at the moment I'm particularly occupied," said Standish, after giving the lady a short bow ; " but I felt I had to stop and dally for just a moment. As I came in the grill just now, a little bird—a Cockney sparrow, to be exact—perched itself on my shoulder—and do you know, Elsa, darling, what it said ? "

" I haven't the remotest idea—and please stop calling me ' Elsa. ' "

" You seem to forget the old days in Paris, my dear"—and at the words she lost something of her marvellous aplomb.

Tiger continued.

" This is what that little Cockney sparrow said—and I would advise you, sweetheart, to listen to every word of it. It said, ' Young men occupying positions of trust should not put too much faith in charming damsels, however infatuated they may be.' " Disregarding Lancing's gasping cry, he stared straight into the girl's face. " And that goes for you, too, my sweet.

Without waiting for the woman to answer, he turned on his heel and abruptly left the table.

Half an hour later he was in his den at Chester Street. Now what to do? Ring up Bellamy and tell him the truth? The damned young fool! No doubt he had been easy prey for so accomplished a seductress as Elsa Brendt—but the thing would have to stop, of course. What would General Lancing say?—It was too awful to contemplate. Turning the problem over in his mind (and this was one of the most difficult puzzles he had ever been asked to solve), he decided to let things remain as they were—at least until the morning. Then, in the presence of Sir Harker Bellamy, he would confront the lad and squeeze the truth out of him. For this was not an ordinary case of a woman-of-the-world's seducing a youngster—men's lives, and perhaps the destiny of nations, hung on it. The triply damned young fool! What on earth had induced him to be such an ass?

The door opened at that moment to admit a visitor.

"General Lancing," announced the butler.

Tiger remained where he was for a moment, his hands clutching the sides of his chair.

He had not time to study further his own thoughts. A tall, immaculately dressed man in mufti, who advanced with outstretched hand, brought him to his feet.

"Why, my dear general, what a pleasure!" he stated.

Lancing waited until the door was closed.

"Delighted to see you again, my boy—but, to tell you the truth, I am here because Bellamy sent me. He wants me to talk over this Paris trip with you, and there are several things to be discussed."

For the next half an hour the two chatted international politics.

"I don't think that war can be delayed another month—that is, unless something very drastic happens to change the present situation," was the general's grave statement, as he prepared to leave.

"You'll come and see me on Monday, as arranged?"

"On Monday at noon." Should he bring up the subject which would have shattered this distinguished soldier's pride with relentless force? Looking at Lancing's face, he felt he was unequal to the task.

For at least a quarter of an hour after the general had gone, Tiger sat, his mind torn by very disturbing emotions. He felt self-humiliated—he had had a job to do and he had failed to do it. Not a pleasant reflection, that, to a man of his temperament.

He was roused by the sound of a telephone's ringing. Abstractedly reaching out a hand, he listened perfunctorily to the inquiry if that was Grosvenor 4000 Y.

"Yes—who the deuce do you think it is?" he demanded irritably.

"Am I speaking to Mr. Standish?"

"Uh-huh."

"Mr. Tiger Standish?"

"Say," he cried, lapsing into the regrettable habit of speaking Americanese, picked up at many cinema feasts, "who are you, anyway?"

A smooth, suave voice answered.

"I was delighted to hear that you had a somewhat narrow escape from being splashed with vitriol this afternoon, Mr. Standish. You will quite understand, I know, when I add that I cannot guarantee that you will be so fortunate a second time."

A laugh—and the line went dead.

The house had seemed intolerably lonely without

Sonia, and slipping out for an hour, he had dined at the Berkeley. Amid that gay gathering of beautiful women and well-dressed men, he had allowed himself to forget the sensational happenings of that day, until—

“There’s a gentleman inquiring for you, Mr. Standish,” stated a page.

Quickly he was on his feet. After Voltag’s words—of course, that telephone message had come from Kuhnreich’s emissary: he had learned the trick from his dead pal Rahusen—he must be on his guard.

“What’s the gentleman’s name?”

“He would not give any name, sir.”

“Where is he?”

“In the entrance, sir.”

One glance—and he recognised Sir Harker Bellamy.

The latter caught him by the arm.

“Something has happened, Tiger,” he started, without preamble.

“What is it?”

The voice of the chief of Q.1 was hushed as he said:

“Young Lancing has just committed suicide—what I have been afraid of during the past few days is true—and now hell will start popping . . . !”

CHAPTER VII

TIGER SIGHS WITH ECSTASY...

TIGER whistled—very softly.

"I'm not at all surprised, sir; I guessed this afternoon that he was the nigger in the chicken-run."

"Why?"

"Well, for one thing, my friend, because, when I called at the office, he looked as though he was expecting utter damnation to fall on him at any moment, whilst later on, dropping into the Beaumont Grill, with whom do you think I saw him holding hands? You'd never guess."

"Don't waste time," snapped Bellamy.

"No, grandpa—certainly not! Well, here you are, then—Elsa Brendt."

The Mole looked round.

"We can't talk here," he said, frowning heavily. "I've got my car outside. Let's go to your house."

Once inside the Daimler, Bellamy turned to the younger man.

"Elsa Brendt; are you sure?"

"Positive! You aren't forgetting that little brush I had with her in Paris a couple of years ago?"

The chief of Q.1 nodded.

"She was working for Caronia then."

"And now, unless I'm wrong in my guess, and I don't imagine I am for a single blessed moment, she's signed up for Kuhnreich. What's more, she knows that I know—when I strolled up in the Beaumont grill this afternoon she pretended at first not to recognise the striking features of your very

humble servant, but she almost ~~went~~ up in flames when I mentioned Paris."

"It's perfectly obvious what has happened," returned Bellamy. "She made a dead set at that young fool Lancing—God only knows what his father will say!—and he told her—how much do you think?"

"Enough to get those five agents of yours bumped off, at any rate. *How* much more we shall have to wait and see. It's unfortunate—"

Bellamy flung his cigar-stub through the window.

"Go on."

"About young Tim Standish. You see, honoured sir, you and I had long been under the fond delusion that no one outside of the regular Ronstadt crowd had any inkling that I did an occasional job of work for Q.R. Now the fat's in the fire and the milk has boiled over. Which reminds me"—and he proceeded to tell the stern-faced Bellamy of the astonishing incident that afternoon when he had gone all gallant and chased a wig.

"All of which seems to indicate that your little game of sending me to the Paris conference ought now to have a tuck put into it," he concluded.

"Wind up?"

The next second Bellamy knew he had made a mistake. What was much more important, he was sorry he had allowed his temper to get the better of both his discretion and his common sense.

"Did I hear you speak, Sir Harker?"

The words were uttered in a voice that sounded as though it had emerged from an ice-chamber.

Bellamy made the *amende honorable*.

"I was a fool," he acknowledged. The remark was allowed to pass unchallenged.

By this time the car had stopped outside Tiger's

new house in Chester Street. Getting out first, Standish looked quickly to right and left. Although it was still early—not yet nine o'clock—the always quiet thoroughfare seemed completely deserted.

"It's all right, sir," he announced, and, Sir Harker Bellamy alighting, the two passed quickly into the house.

The omnipresent Benny Bannister, Tiger's personal servant, whose private opinion of all other kinds of servitors in the establishment would have been heavily censored by the Talks Department of the B.B.C., received them. Benny eyed Sir Harker Bellamy, whom he regarded as the evil genius of his employer (didn't he seriously interfere with Tiger's football?), ominously.

"'Evenin'," he said shortly.

Bellamy gave him a curt nod. He had lit a fresh cigar and was chewing the end viciously.

"Anything happened, Benny?" inquired Standish.

"No—nothin', sir. Man called about the telephone—that's all. I'll get your letters."

With the evening mail in his hand, he led the way into the den at the back of the house, put another log on the fire, placed whisky decanter, siphon and glasses on a small table between the two leather easy-chairs, made a grimace at Bellamy behind the visitor's back, winked at Tiger, who turned just in time to see the facial contortion, and then departed.

Bellamy flung himself back into his chair.

"Well, now," he restarted, "let's go over the facts. Thanks to the treachery of Lancing, Kuhnreich must have obtained, through the Brendt woman and Voltag, a good deal of very valuable information. Exactly how much we cannot even

guess yet, but enough, at any rate, to make things damnably awkward for our resident agents in Ronstadt. Of course, as soon as I realised that something was wrong in the office, I sent out a general warning, besides changing all codes—but it's very annoying, all the same. I don't like taking a punch on the jaw like this without hitting back, and yet to arrest either Voltag or the Brendt woman now—”

“ You couldn't do that,” broke in Standish.

“ Why not ? ”

“ Because, my venerable and revered fathead, I want to play a few games with both the beauteous Elsa and the not-so-beauteous Emil Voltag. I—”

Tiger broke off a second time. He now rose and started to cross the room with a panther-like stride.

“ What the—? ” started Bellamy ; but was hushed into silence by a warning gesture of Tiger's right hand.

The chief of Q.1 continued to watch his favourite agent intently. Tiger was humming a little tune to himself ; he appeared to be in high spirits. Why, Bellamy could not yet decide, but he noticed that Tiger went straight to the telephone, which was resting on a beautiful refectory table below the window.

Standish's eyes followed the telephone wire. Suddenly he seemed attracted to something. He knelt down and examined the carpet. His inspection lasted several seconds, and then he beckoned Bellamy to come over.

The chief of Q.1 got on his hands and knees ; there was a wire—so thin as to be almost imperceptible—running beneath the carpet.

"I'll tell you what it is, Jonesy, old man," said Tiger surprisingly. "If I don't get two goals for the Swifts on Saturday I'll eat my hat—no, yours; it's much the older one. Now don't stop to argue," he continued to blather, like a man who had suddenly lost his reason. "I know exactly what you're going to say, and it won't alter my opinion a bit."

Whilst he was talking he had gone to a desk in the opposite corner and had taken from a drawer a pair of wire clippers.

"I'll bet you ten to one I'll get those two goals against Firfield," he boasted, returning to the side of the astounded Bellamy. Lifting his hand in a second gesture of warning, Tiger made a swift move and suddenly swept the telephone off the table on to the floor. "Look out, Benny, you damned fool!" he shouted, going off at a second paralysing tangent. "See what you've done—busted the telephone again!"

As he finished speaking, he stooped and snipped the hidden wire with the cutters he held in his right hand. By the time he had risen to his feet once more, Bannister, the ever-alert, had rushed in through the door.

"What's the matter, guv'nor?" he asked.

"See if the telephone is working, Benny—why are you such a clumsy ass?"

If he had not been used to his employer's peculiar moods, Bannister might well have stopped to argue; as it was, knowing very well that Tiger had some good reason for making this remark, he picked up the instrument, replaced it on the desk and lifted the earpiece.

"Is that the exchange?" he asked, after a pause. . . . "No, it's all right. I knocked the

receiver over and I wondered if we were still connected. . . . It's all right, sir," he wound up, hanging the receiver back on its hook, "we're still connected."

"O.K." Tiger pointed to the door, and Benny, a puzzled expression on his homely features, returned to his own quarters.

"May I inquire what all this monkey business means?" asked Bellamy.

"You may. But I should have thought that a man of your intelligence would have tumbled to it already. That wire leading from the telephone and running beneath the carpet, to be connected with the empty house next door, belonged, unless I'm wrong in my guess, to a detectaphone, and was placed there by some inquisitive-minded person to obtain an earful of what my visitors—especially the illustrious chief of Q.I., British Intelligence—and myself chin-wagged about. Savvy? That explains the presence here of the gentleman from the telephone company this afternoon—you remember that Bannister mentioned the fact when we came in? The 'phone hasn't been functioning too well lately, and I had to ring up the supervisor this morning. My hat, chief, you must give Voltag and company credit for a pretty good intelligence service."

"Let's have Bannister in."

"Very well." Tiger pressed a bell.

"Yes, sir?" inquired Benny, a few seconds later.

"Tell me, Benny, what about this man who came from the telephone company this afternoon? What was he like?"

"Well, guv'nor, he was just like a man from the telephone company—that's all I can tell you. He wore a kind of dirty uniform and had a bag of

tools. He gave me some kind of order from the company to examine the telephone. . . . Why, is there anything wrong?"

"Not a thing; it's all right, Benny—I just wanted to know."

"Pretty cute, eh?" went on Tiger after his servant had gone. . . . Well, Benny, what is it now?" For Bannister had returned.

"The man from the telephone company is here again, sir."

If he had made the announcement that he had been left a million of money unexpectedly and proposed handing the whole sum over to his employer, Tiger could not have registered greater joy. He bent his body double, twisted his legs, cracked several joints in his fingers, emitted a deep sigh indicative of ecstasy—and then turned to Sir Harker Bellamy.

"Better leave this to me, sir," he said in a whisper. "Do you mind going into the dining-room?"

"The fellow may be armed."

"Leave it to me, sir," repeated Standish.

Knowing his man, Sir Harker followed the pointing finger. A moment later, the door closed quietly behind him.

"Now, then," said Tiger, rubbing his hands.

Bannister ventured a few feet forward.

"Have you gone crackers, guv'nor?"

"Certainly not," retorted his master with tremendous dignity. "Didn't I understand you to say that a gentleman had called to see me? Very well, show him in."

Shaking his head as though things were happening that were utterly beyond his comprehension, Bannister turned and vanished.

He returned half a minute later with a man dressed in the uniform of a post office official.

"Very sorry to trouble you, Mr. Standish, but there's something gone wrong with your phone again," he announced.

Tiger stood, regarding him.

"Is there?" he returned. "My man knocked it over some time ago, but we got the exchange all right."

"It's all right your end, sir, but people can't get connected with you. They've reported they're unable to get your number, so I've been sent along to see what the trouble is."

"At this time of night! Well, that's what I call service! All right, go ahead." With perfect unconcern he picked up the evening paper and, seating himself, started to read. But all the time he was watching the man over the top of the *Evening Sun*. His hand went into his right coat pocket and emerged, holding a small revolver. Meanwhile, the man was examining the telephone connections. Repressing a chuckle, Tiger noticed that he was very intent on looking for the break in the detectaphone wire.

Finally, thinking the joke had gone far enough, Tiger put down his paper, stood up, and said in a very quiet voice:

"Do you mind putting your hands above your head, and keeping them there?"

The telephone man wheeled round, his face contorted. Then he slowly raised his hands.

"Thank you," said Standish, "that's much better. If you're looking for that detectaphone you placed here this afternoon, I may as well tell you I discovered it quite a while ago and cut the wire." Raising his voice, he called, "Benny!"

Bannister entered at a trot.

"Benny, see what this rat's got on him."

Bannister, used to such manœuvres, ran his hands rapidly over the clothes of the masquerader:

"Nothing, sir," he announced, "just a few odds and ends, including what looks like last week's handkerchief."

"All right. Got a bit of cord handy?"

As though he had been anticipating such a request, Benny put a hand into his coat pocket and withdrew it, holding several yards of thin cord.

"Tie his hands behind his back," ordered Tiger. And, to the man, "Don't try any tricks—this pop-gun has a habit of going off."

Evidently taking a craftsman's pleasure in the job, Benny tied the man's hands securely behind him.

"I'm an official—the government will have something to say about this!" exploded the prisoner.

Tiger drawled:

"I shouldn't be in the least surprised. They're probably very fond of you in government circles. They might even ask you to be their guest for several years. You never know. . . . Quite secure, Benny? Thanks very much. You can go back into the kitchen now, if you like, and read *Good Words*."

"I never read *Good Words*."

"You should."

"Will you be all right, guv'nor?"

"Will I be all right!"

Smirking, Bannister departed once again.

Tiger, lounging negligently on the side of the refectory table, which he used as a writing-desk, looked at the masquerader intently.

"Feel like talking?" he asked casually.

"I don't know what you mean," was the reply.
"This is an outrage. . . ."

"Of course it's an outrage. The truth is, I'm quite mad. You see, I hate the telephone. It's a modern evil which drives me nearly insane. And when they send telephone inspectors to see about it, I generally gobble them whole." His voice changed from its former bantering tone. "Now, come on; let's get at the truth. Who's at the ~~back~~ of this racket?"

The man remained silent.

"Not going to talk, eh? Well, you may change your mind shortly."

That brought a spate of words.

"Damn you for a bloody fool! Look here, Mr. Standish, let me give you a word of advice: if you're a wise man you'll let me go; if you don't, it'll be the worst day's work you've ever done. Get me?"

Tiger pretended to burst into tears.

"But I'm not a wise man, I'm just an idiot. Didn't I tell you just now how foolish I was? And aren't you a dreadful little telephone man, trying to frighten me like this?"

At this point, Sir Harker Bellamy, who must have overheard the voices from the adjoining dining-room, now stepped upon the scene.

Tiger turned. Bellamy could see he was displeased.

"You might have a look at this fellow and see if you recognise him," Standish said to the chief of Q.I.

Bellamy, putting up his monocle, thrust his grim face near to that of the prisoner.

"Yes, I know him—his name is Schulz—or used to be. Well, we will soon settle his hash. Do you mind if I use your telephone?"

"Not at all". The two might have been exchanging matter of fact pleasantries.

Going to the instrument, Bellamy called a number. He was quickly connected. Then :

"That you, Lellant? This is Bellamy. I'm speaking from Tiger Standish's house, 217 Chester Street. . . . Well, now, listen : we've just captured a burglar. . . . Yes, you heard what I said—a *burglar*. He's rather too dangerous to be allowed out alone, we both think, and so if you'd be good enough to send a man—or perhaps a couple of men. . . . Thanks very much. Yes, I'll be seeing you soon."

"Ingenious," commented Tiger three-quarters of an hour later.

Bellamy and he had just returned from a tour of inspection next door. They had gone armed with revolvers—a circumstance which, considering the recent happenings, they both deemed expedient.

"You see what happened," he continued, as he handed his superior officer a stiff drink. "They took the house next door unfurnished for a short period, probably paying the agents a sum down (exactly how much I'll find out to-morrow, provided I'm still sufficiently curious), got a board—

LET BY
CORAM AND CORAM

the big West End agents—put up, and then all they had to do was to sit quietly down on their b.t.m.'s and listen-in not only to every bit of talk that went on in this room, but to every phone call that came in and went out of the house. I take it the fellow Schulz must have been already on duty—don't you

think?—otherwise, how could he have been Mister Johnny-on-the-Spot so quickly? Answer me that, most erudite sir."

The high spirits of the speaker were not reflected in the reply of the chief of Q.I. .

"Their infernal impudence!" exclaimed Bellamy.

"Exactly—and then some! But, y'know, I can't help admiring 'em, all the same. And, after all, everything is fair in love and this little game that we're playing. We've got a bit of ~~our~~ own back, anyway—they can't say they've scored *all* the points. . . . Going?"

"I must," declared Bellamy.

"Then I'll see you safely off. One can't be too careful on a night like this. . . . Another spot before you toddle?"

Sir Harker accepted the second whisky and lowered it expeditiously.

A couple of minutes later the two wished each other good-night.

CHAPTER VIII

THE ENEMY CONFER

MEANWHILE, in the very pleasant room of this Kensington house—which differed in no outward particular from every other house in that very respectable Kensington crescent—two people were waiting. At the elbow of the man stood a telephone, and every other minute he looked as though uttering a malediction on it for not doing what he wanted it to do.

The fashionably-attired young woman—she had flung open her evening cloak, displaying a pair of seductively moulded and dazzlingly white shoulders—who was Emil Voltag's companion, regarded the other's impatience with a covert smile. What children men were! What right did they possess to have confidence bestowed on them? Take this Voltag person, for instance: just because his underling, Schulz, had not telephoned at a certain time, as arranged, he was already hot under the collar and inexcusably flustered. How ridiculous!

“Something's gone wrong!” spluttered the man she had been mentally criticising. Emil Voltag shifted his body in the swivel chair and turned to her.

“He's only half an hour late,” she mildly expostulated.

“Mother of God!” he roared. “Half an hour can be a lifetime at a moment like this!”

Elsa Brendt shrugged her shoulders indifferently. She had always had a mild contempt for the man under whom that fox Crosber, sitting in his room at the Wilhelmstrasse at Pé, had ordered her to work

—and—after her recent dazzling success with young Victor Lancing (five of Bellamy's best agents scuppered!)—she had not cared overmuch if she showed it. That had been one of her chief assets during the five years she had been playing havoc amid the chancelleries of Europe and America—her supreme confidence. And hadn't she sufficient cause? At the moment she could command a higher price for her services than any other woman agent in the world.

She yawned. There was a party which promised to be amusing waiting for her at the *Café de Paris* and she wanted to get along.

“Not yet—you'll stay here.” Voltag, looking like a cornered bear, had noticed the movement with her evening wrap and barked out the command.

“I thought you were going to give me some instructions. And let me remind you, Herr Voltag, that I am not accustomed to being addressed in this manner.”

He growled at her afresh.

“You will wait until I hear from Schulz—what can be keeping the fool?”

With that she became impatient.

“If you will allow me to say so, it was a foolish idea to try to trap the gallant Mr. Standish that way. I know from experience that it is extremely difficult to get the best results from a detectaphone arrangement—and what did you hope to learn that I had not already told you as the result of my acquaintance with Victor Lancing?—Poor young fool, it is sad to think he is dead.” She yawned again. “You should have left the Tiger to me—I would have tamed him!”

Into the greenish-tinted eyes there came a flame. She would not know contentment, Elsa Brendt

told herself, until she had obtained satisfaction for the insult Standish had offered her in the Beaumont Grill that afternoon. That Paris incident. . . . Yes, she remembered it well enough; she had sufficient cause, seeing that it was the only occasion on which she had been forced to bungle a special mission. Standish had been responsible for this—it was he who had passed the word to Lucieto of the French counter-espionage service, perhaps the deadliest of all her enemies . . . and, as a result, she had been lucky to get out of the apartment of the Comte de la Lajonquièr alive. But it was a pity, because le Comte, with whom she had been conducting a particularly passionate affair for the previous six weeks, had promised her information (for which he had pumped no less a personage than the Minister of War himself) vitally important to her then paymaster. . . . Oh, yes, she was not likely to rest until she had cried "Quits" with the fine British gentleman who rejoiced in such a picturesque soubriquet.

Her reflections were shattered by the sound of the telephone's ringing.

"At last!" she heard Voltag exclaim.

He snatched off the receiver and listened intently. The woman saw his face change. It became contorted with passion. A blistering oath fouled the air.

"Things gone wrong?" she inquired after he had replaced the receiver.

"Standish discovered the detectaphone—Schulz bungled it. He has been taken to Scotland Yard, charged with burglary. How can I do anything surrounded by such fools?"

Elsa Brendt smiled sweetly.

"Does that remark apply to me?" she countered.

"Oh, no, of course not," she went on quickly. "You possess far too much sense. If you cast your mind back a little while, Herr Voltag, you will no doubt recall that I prophesied failure in this particular respect; the greatest mistake one can make in our business is to under-estimate one's adversary. Tiger Standish may look the typical English fool—but you should know by this time that he possesses a very acute brain. Look what he did to your former associates, Hamme and Rahusen. . . . Oh, yes, Crosber told me the whole story before I came to England. It would have been far better if you had instructed me to deal with that very impetuous young man."

He turned his livid face.

"You appear to be forgetting the incident in Paris."

"On the contrary," she told him with a change of tone, "that particular affair is very vivid in my mind at the present time."

"Very well," he said, rising to his feet; "here are your instructions: get Standish. If you can't get him here, wait until he goes to Paris."

"Thank you, Herr Voltag." She swept him a mock curtsey, picked up her gloves and bag and left the room.

Voltag, never a very patient man, allowed his rage full vent as soon as he was alone. Whichever way he turned, he found himself beaten by this confounded Englishman. This had been bearable in the past, because the brunt of the odium attached to failure had been borne by others. But, now that Rahusen had passed out of the arena, and he himself had taken over the part of the protagonist—now that he alone was responsible for the very intricate organisation that linked England up with the net-

work of espionage in other countries which Kuhnreich had sworn should one day become vassals to Ronstadt, he felt like risking everything and taking on himself the rôle of exterminator.

Yet he must be careful; even in his blind, unreasoning rage he realised this: a false step now, and the great *coup* which Kuhnreich had planned would irretrievably fail. Even now, owing to the bungling of that fool Schulz, Bellamy and his chief agent, the man whose death he so vehemently desired, had been placed on their guard. No doubt Standish had told his chief of the incident in Whitehall. . . . Voltag's face crimsoned at the memory. That insult could only be wiped out by blood.

His angry reflections were interrupted by a servant's entering the room.

"No. 27," he announced.

Voltag nodded.

A minute later, a tall, slim, well-dressed man, who carried in his presence the unmistakable touch of the Gallic, stood bowing to his employer. André Dupeyron was a renegade Frenchman, and, in spite of his polish, looked it.

"Well?" barked Voltag.

For reply, No. 27 took from his pocket a wallet.

"I followed M. Standish as requested," he stated. "I got my opportunity when he was witnessing a rather remarkable occurrence—the upsetting of some carboys of vitriol—at Waterloo Place. He did not know he had missed this," went on the speaker, whose record as a pickpocket (and other things) was duly noted in the files at the Sûreté.

With the hope that the purloined wallet might supply some solace for his tortured pride, the chief of the Ronstadtian Espionage Service in London plunged his fingers into the pocket-book.

Visiting cards . . . two or three receipted bills . . . a couple of letters . . . that was all.

All—except a small sheet of paper which, when smoothed out, read as under :

"**MY DEAR VOLTAG**,—In case—you notice that I say 'in case'—this should be mislaid in any way, I take the liberty of informing you that I never carry important papers on my person.

Perhaps you would make a note of this for future reference?—Yours in the Cause,

T. O. STANDISH."

André Dupeyron rather prided himself on his knowledge of blasphemous idioms, but the voluminous flow of words from his employer's lips left him staggered.

Silently—and discreetly—he effaced himself. He did not wait to add that he had taken it on himself to telephone a somewhat impertinent message to the man whose pocket he had so adroitly picked.

CHAPTER IX

"COKE" MAHON PAYS A VISIT

IT had been a beastly crossing, and "Coke" Mahon had suffered. Something must have gone radically wrong with his inside, he decided. In any case, he felt like death.

But for the strict warning he had received from his paymasters, he would have undertaken the journey from Pé by air. But Crosber, Head of the Secret Police, had told him quite definitely that he must take the Channel boat.

"For one thing," he had added, "there will be far more people and the scrutiny of the English detectives will consequently be much less severe. Not that I have any doubt whatever but that you will get through—the passport describing you as the representative of M. Schmidt, a well-known toy manufacturer of Nuremberg, added to the fact that your appearance has been entirely altered by our make-up experts, will see to that."

So the ex-Chicago killer had taken the longest route—but, as he leaned over the side of the *Maid of Orleans*, not caring in the least whether his tortured body should be swallowed up by the swirling waters below, he cursed his folly. Although only half an hour had passed since he left the Calais quayside, he swore that he would not undergo such an experience again—no, not for double five grand.

Still, since there is an end to everything, the dirty white cliffs of Dover, standing up from the sea like bulwarks, saw Mahon's spirits rise. His stomach was still turning somersaults, but soon he would be stepping on steady land instead of the rolling deck of this lousy torture-chamber.

Putting a hand into his pocket, he withdrew what looked like a small snuff-box.

He sniffed . . . and immediately felt reinvigorated. The "happy dust" would get him in the end, he supposed, as it had got so many others; but he had reached the stage when he simply couldn't do without "snow."

It was as Crosber had prophesied: although the man standing by the side of the passport officials looked so much like a "dick" that he could not have been mistaken for anything else, and gave the undersized visitor a searching stare, the supposed toy-

maker's representative was allowed to pass on his way without comment.

This was "Coke" Mahon's first visit to England, and the serenity of everything he witnessed, coming on top of the feverish excitement that had pervaded life generally during his sojourn on the Continent, left him bewildered. He had heard a lot about the calm purposefulness of the British, but the matter-of-factness with which existence proceeded outdid all the stories. No wonder, he said in his haste, the English crook had such an easy time of it! Why, these people were simply made to be fooled.

Seated in a corner of a third-class carriage bound for Victoria—although he liked his comfort, "Coke" thought it best to follow strictly the instructions he had received at Pé—the professional killer allowed his made-up face to slip into a smile.

It would be easy!

Take this fellow Standish—the first name on his list—for instance. Why, according to Crosber, all sorts of guys had tried to bump this big cheese off, but with no result. Well, once he got a sight of him. . . . Putting a hand to his left armpit, he made sure that the gun on the handle of which there were already twenty-five notches was ready for action.

Five grand just for bumping off a couple of guys! Back in "Chi," especially in the old days, he had done a dozen "jobs" for far less than that. Re-invigorated by his recent dose of cocaine, "Coke" decided that he was sitting pretty.

A crook will always seek his native environment. Feeling lonely, Mahon had gone to Soho immediately after arriving at Victoria. It was common knowledge in the States that the criminal

headquarters of England were situated in the network of mean, tortuous, sordid and often high-smelling streets that lay at the back of London's chief amusement centre.

Only half an hour had passed since he found himself in the Spotted Leopard. This was the way of it: walking up Old Compton Street, keeping a sharp look-out for anything that might happen, he, without thinking, put a hand on the arm of a man sauntering by. He had worked with "Buck" Masters when the latter was carrying a gun for the great Scarpio—once the overlord of Chicago, but now eating his heart out in the island fortress prison off the San Francisco coast. But upon being hailed, Masters had looked at him with suspicion out of narrow-slit eyes.

"What's the big idea?" he said under his breath.

"It's all right, Buck—it's me."

"And who's 'me'?"

"'Coke.'

"'Coke' Mahon! Jeez! You're kidding."

"It's me all right, Buck"—and he gave the other a sign. Back in the brave days of 1930 the brotherhood of assassins who served on Scarpio's payroll were able to recognise one another by this secret gesture.

"Well, I'll be God-damned!" exclaimed Masters. "What are you doing in this burg, anyway—and why the fancy dress?"

Mahon exercised caution. These were hard days for ex-Chicago gun-carriers, and he had no desire to let his old comrade in on his prospective good fortune. He almost wished that—in spite of his loneliness—he had allowed the other to pass by. Still, it was too late now to draw back.

"Thought I'd run over and see how tricks were in this country. I always heard that a smart guy could get his hands on some sugar pretty easy in London," he hedged.

Masters gave a silent but mocking laugh.

"Who spieled that stuff?" he returned. "It ain't true, anyway—why, if you as much as look cross-eyed at a guy in this country, the dicks will be on you like a ton of coal. It's only the cat-burglars and the 'black' merchants who pull in the dough. Let you show as much as the handle of a gun, and they'll jump you into 'stir' without a word. If you think of carrying on the old game here, 'Coke,' forget it."

This was not encouraging, especially in view of the fact that his last sniff of cocaine had already lost its effect; but, taking advantage of Masters' offer of hospitality, he had allowed himself to be piloted to the underground café called the Spotted Leopard, which he understood from his former co-worker was the headquarters of all the big shots in London.

Going down a narrow alleyway leading off one of the main Soho streets, Masters knocked twice on a door, the paint of which should have been renewed long before, and "Coke" found himself staring into the face of a hugely-built man with the coldest pair of eyes he had ever encountered. They were like twin pieces of ice, drilling into his soul.

"It's all right, 'Doll,'" proffered his companion. "This is a boy from 'way back. He worked with me for Scarpio in the old days."

"O.K.," was the brief comment, and the mammoth stood aside. "You're responsible, Buck."

At the slowly-spoken words, "Coke" reached for his snuff-box.

The action was noted with a look of unmistakable contempt on the part of the giant guardian.

"A snifter, eh?" he sneered.

"Always that way," replied Masters.

"Well, tell him not to start any of his funny stuff here—that's all," was the grim warning.

The visitor kept silent in spite of the jolt to his pride. He recognised a master-mind when he saw one—and this critic, who must have weighed at least eighteen stones and carried no superfluous fat at that, belonged unmistakably to that category.

A touch on the arm made him move forward by the side of his cicerone.

Masters walked a few yards along the dirt-encrusted passage and then came to a short flight of stairs. These numbered six, Mahon counted, and when he had stepped off the lowest one he stared around with interest. For this was the meeting-place, he had been assured, of all that was brightest and best in London crookdom.

There were perhaps fifty men and women in that underground room. The majority of them were well-dressed—surprisingly well-dressed, for when the Soho criminal has money he spends a good proportion of it on clothes.

"It's all right, boys," announced Masters. "I knew this guy back in Chi."

It was perhaps as well that he had made this introduction, for at the entrance of the stranger in their midst the habitués of the Spotted Leopard had all risen from their chairs and—stiffened. Prying eyes were not welcomed in that underground room, where devotees of the crooked arts and crafts met to take their ease. Like other clubmen and women, they desired a respite from the cares of toil.

On the opposite side of the room to the entrance

there was a small bar, at which drunks were being served.

" Sit down, ' Coke '—what will you have ? "

" Whisky," breathed Mahon.

Every criminal is vain, and it was perhaps because he wished to demonstrate how well he had established himself in British criminal quarters within so short a time that Masters now proceeded to do the honours. He not only paid for a couple of drunks, but handed out illuminating information.

Whilst Mahon, seeing everything but giving no sign thereof, took in the distempered walls, the colour scheme of which was a dull maroon, the number of round tables with uncomfortable-looking chairs that flanked them, the various gambling machines over which men and women lolled (for these were the main furnishings of the large room), Masters spoke his piece:

" This is the real McCoy," he said in a low tone. " All the big shots come here at some time or other. See that dame over there ? " gesturing to a slightly-built, fashionably-dressed woman of middle age who was sitting alone in a corner, meditatively smoking a cigarette.

" Yeah—I see her. What's her line ? " inquired " Coke. "

Masters sniggered.

" They call her ' Holy Helen. ' You wouldn't guess her layout—no, not in a thousand years. She visits the big churches in this burg—Westminster Abbey and St. Paul's Cathedral amongst them—and pinches women's handbags when they're on their knees praying. "

" Coke " nodded. He had heard too much about crime, had mixed with too many of its practitioners, had devoted too many years of his own life to

working in the underworld, to be surprised. And if he had felt any astonishment he would not have given himself away.

"And that fellah?" he asked, turning slightly to the right.

The man to whom he now referred was heavily-built, noticeably well-dressed in a suit that must have been cut in Savile Row, wore beautifully made shoes with silk socks, and might have been taken for a prosperous stockbroker. That was, until one looked at his eyes.

"Him?" returned Masters. "Oh, he ships femmes to the Argentine—one of the biggest white slavers in the business. Like an introduction?"

"No, thanks." Mahon had his own code. He lived by killing—or had done so in the past—but there were limits. He might patronise the Red Light districts when in holiday mood, but he had never gone in for the "meat trade" and did not intend to start in that line now. Within closely-defined limits, he was a gentleman of strict principles.

There was another person at the Spotted Leopard that night who aroused his curiosity. This was a tall, slim man of late middle-age. He had silver-grey hair and wore wonderful clothes. In fact, his whole appearance was most distinguished. "Breed" was stamped all over him—even if it was race gone bad. "Coke" had seen his like haunting the speakeasies of the prohibition era, and thought he knew the type.

But he was wrong.

What Masters told him about this man (whom he called "the King Pin") made him suck in his breath. Apparently there were depths of infamy in London that went lower than any known in the American underworld.

One other piece of information Masters handed on as he brought his guest the second whisky-and-soda.

"That big fellow at the door runs this joint," he explained, "and what he says goes. 'Doll' Gunn, his name is, and he's the biggest fence in the business. The police know that, but they can't get anything on him—at least, they haven't been able to up to now. Jewels are his speciality. When's he's not collecting them he's talking—don't laugh—football."

Football!

The word brought "Coke" Mahon's mind back to business—his own particular line of business. The first name on the list he had been handed on leaving Pé was that of Tiger Standish—and Tiger Standish, according to the information given him by Kuhnreich and Crosber, from whom he had already drawn half a grand, with another half to come when he had produced proof of his efficiency, was the leading amateur player of football in England.

"I'd like a talk with 'Doll,'" he stated.

"All right. He's a guy worth knowing—but let him do most of the spieling ; he's built that way."

"Shoots the lip, eh ?"

"Yeah. But he knows what he's talking about—and, as I've already told you, what he says goes in this joint."

"O.K."

Masters beckoned across the room. The keeper of the crooks' club showed that he had not yet overcome his initial dislike of Mahon by scowling as he obeyed the summons. He could stand practically any class of degenerate, but he drew the line at dope fiends. A few years before, "Doll" Gunn had been a professional athlete—an all-in wrestler when that curious form of physical barbarity had started its boom—and, although the atmosphere

in which he now lived was an almost perpetual "fug," he retained certain of his former ideals. He tried to keep his giant strength going by regular exercise, and anything in the nature of a physical weakling excited his scathing contempt.

He had not cared for the look of Masters' companion from the beginning, but because "Buck" had been the means of putting one or two good things in his way lately—the American had formed a useful alliance with Claud Bray, the "ace" cat-burglar—he consented to sit at the table and swallow a ginger-ale. The association of this innocuous drink with the forbidding visage of the man so grotesquely nicknamed "Doll" was laughable—but Gunn was the type who, having made a resolution, kept to it: he knew alcohol was bad for him and so he kept off the stuff.

He put one or two searching questions to Masters, and the latter, sensing that truth was the better part, told something of Mahon's past.

The scowl on Gunn's face deepened.

"Better not try pulling any gun stuff here," he growled. "The Dicks won't stand for murder in this country, and the sooner you know that the better for you."

The tone was so offensive that "Coke" bridled.

"I guess," he said somewhat belligerently, "that here's one guy who could fool your dicks."

As soon as he had spoken, he knew that he had committed an error; the big man's eyes glared into his.

Masters, alarmed for his own sake as well as that of Mahon, endeavoured to restore peace.

"'Coke' was just joking, 'Doll'—forget it." And then, as the giant continued to scowl: "How are the games going?"

To every man his hobby: it pleased "Doll" Gunn, a minor Napoleon of crime (at least so far as proceeds from thefts were concerned), to fill in his leisure moments studying "form." But it was not the past performances of racehorses that intrigued his attention—no, "Doll" Gunn's preoccupation was with the next week-end's professional football matches. There wasn't a team in the three divisions of the English League that "Doll" imagined he could not place accurately in their order of merit. He was familiar with the most recent form of every prominent player. It was his secret ambition to be engaged as a football scout. Altogether, Gunn could be summed up as one of the most perfervid fans in the whole country.

What was more, he was sportsman enough to back his fancies—heavily. The fact that every football bookmaker in Soho took several pounds off him each week-end merely served to inflame his absorption in the sport which holds the British masses' interest each Saturday afternoon.

The scowl now left his face. His eyes lit up; his voice shook with excitement.

"You must come with me on Saturday to see the Swifts, Buck," he said hoarsely; "it'll be an eye-opener to you. From what I've seen on the films, your football in the States is a mixture of—well," as words failed him, "damned if I know what to call it! But Soccer is a science—pretty to watch, and with a thrill coming every minute! Yes," he went on, "you'll have to come with me to the Swifts' ground on Saturday. Tiger Standish is playing . . . did he say anything?" he broke off, the former belligerence returning to his face as he stared at Mahon.

"No, of course he didn't." Masters, having

distinctly heard the muttered ejaculation of the man he had brought to the Spotted Leopard, flashed Mahon a warning glance. What did "Coke" mean by getting across the man he had warned him against? Hadn't the fool any sense?

"Coke," dissembling, did his little bit.

"I was just curious to know why the guy you're talking about is called 'Tiger,'" he said.

The explanation was accepted. "Doll" Gunn proceeded with his tale.

"He's called 'Tiger' because he's so quick on the ball—Standish, although the son of a lord, is the best centre-forward playing football at the present time. They say," he went on in a confidential whisper, as though he were a tipster retailing information which had come direct from the horse's mouth, "that he's going abroad to play with the English team against France and other Continental countries. My God, he'll show them Frenchies how to score goals!"

Mahon secretly smiled. The poor mutt! But, although "Coke" despised the big man for his blatant ecstasy, he continued to dissemble.

"Son of a lord?" he repeated. "He's got the dough, then?"

"Not so much. The Quorn family were never very well off, although they're top-notchers in every other way." The scowl returned for the second time.

"Any one who tries to do Tiger dirt will have to reckon with me," "Doll" Gunn proceeded unexpectedly to declaim.

"Why, is he a pal of yours?" asked Mahon innocently.

"No. Never met him—but all the same, he's a pal of mine."

It was only a strong sense of self-protection that

prevented "Coke" from shaking his head. Fancy a guy being so loopy as all that! He had heard of business men—millionaires, some of them, too,—back in the States paying hero-worship to big ball-players, but this present specimen of that class of idiots beat the band.

"You'll have to excuse me now," rumbled "Doll" Gunn, rising from the inadequate chair.

As he lumbered across the room, "Coke" burst into a silent laugh.

"What's eating you, Mahon?" "Buck" Masters' voice held a threat.

"Oh, nothing. Only it seems so damned funny to hear that guy going all mushy over a football player."

"Well," warned Masters, "whatever you think, keep it under your hat. 'Doll' has a big say here, and if you intend to stick on in this burg it's best to keep on the right side of him. I shan't tell you again about that."

"O.K."

But when "Coke" Mahon locked the door of the bedroom in Frith Street to which Masters piloted him late that same night, he flung himself on the bed and gave himself over to hectic merriment.

The poor mutt!

CHAPTER X

THE CROWD'S ROAR

SIXTY thousand strong, the crowd was waiting. Trade depressions might come, bills arrive in battalions, worries of all kinds abound, but the

British working man was not to be deprived of his Saturday afternoon's favourite sport.

Football ! The very word held a potent spell.

And, to keep the interest flaming, the match to-day, between those traditional rivals, Firfield and the Swifts, had a particular claim. For wasn't that beloved hero of the populace, Tiger Standish, turning out for the home side after an absence of several months from the churned-turf arena ?

During the period that the wearers of the scarlet jersey had been deprived of his services the proudest club in London had languished. To be bereft of the very spear-head of the attack—and a player, at that, who was generally acknowledged to be the most brilliant exponent of centre-forward play that had been seen during the past decade—was a handicap that had kept them from gaining many vital points. But, now that Standish's knee trouble had been declared cured—a piece of information which had gained headlines in the sporting columns of the evening papers—hopes ruled high once more. There was not a man amongst the Swifts' supporters who would not have gambled a week's wages on the result of the game that afternoon.

Inside the home dressing-room, Tiger leisurely changed. He appeared somewhat abstracted and in their ignorance the other Swifts' players put this mood down to his wondering how he would shape that afternoon after being so long out of practice. But, if he had told them the truth—a contingency which he did not for a moment contemplate—Standish would have imparted the information that his preoccupied air was due, not to any speculation about the match with Firfield, but as to what fresh move the enemy, in the shape of Voltag and com-

pany, were planning against "The Mole" and himself.

Since the incident of the discovered detectaphone wire two nights before, nothing had occurred to disturb the serenity of his existence. This, he confessed to himself with an impish grin, was rather to be deplored: he hated to fall back into the ordinary ways of life after being on the heights. Of course, Sonia (bless her !) would have told him he was a thoroughly disreputable person for harbouring such thoughts—but Sonia (bless her again !) was still in the wilds of Worcester, attending her sick aunt, and, according to a telephone message he had received that very lunch-time, could not contemplate returning home for at least another week.

"But oh, darling, how I do miss you!" The words coming over the wire had given him a guilty pang. He ought, he supposed, to have come clean with her and told the whole story of what had happened since she had received the telegram summoning her from home; but his courage failed him. A lion in other respects, he was a mouse in this particular.

Every time the dressing-room door opened, the excited murmurings of the vast crowd could be heard. At any other time this would undoubtedly have acted as a stimulus to him—but now his thoughts continued to be elsewhere. They were back in that small, book-lined room in the *cul de sac* off Whitehall, where Sir Harker Bellamy, the greatest Secret Service chief that England had ever known spent so many hours defeating the machinations of his country's enemies. He had not heard from Bellamy since they had parted outside his house on Thursday night. With such deadly

peril threatening. "The Mole" at every turn, this silence would have been somewhat disquieting if he had not known Bellamy's ways. "The Mole"—true to his nickname—would disappear underground for days at a time, only to emerge when he had successfully brought off some amazing *coup* at the expense of his foes. Perhaps something of the sort might be happening now.

The manager of the Swifts bustled in at that moment and took Tiger by the arm.

"Record crowd, Mr. Standish," he announced.

"Good!" The amateur centre-forward's comment was laconic. Fond as he was of football, he could not help comparing the varying values of the match that afternoon and of the much grimmer game he was playing unknown to every one except a selected few.

He was snapped out of his reflections by Bell, the Swifts' captain and left back, as he thrust the practice ball into his hands.

"You're skipper for to-day, Mr. Standish," he announced—and just then the referee poked his head round the door to call loudly :

"Out with you, boys!"

Exactly thirty seconds later the mammoth crowd, recognising its favourite hero, burst into exultant acclamation.

Tiger took the field amidst a frenzy of admiration.

Slightly dazed, he stood still for a moment—and in that moment a man began to edge his way through the closely-packed crowd towards the railings.

CHAPTER XI/

DRAMA ON THE TOUCHLINE

FOR several seconds Tiger stood motionless. He could not rid his mind of the conviction that something was wrong—that, hidden away amidst the cheering thousands who were shouting his name, lurked an enemy. Not given usually to fanciful imaginings, he now felt that his intuition had not let him down. Why this message should have been flashed to his brain he could not tell—but shortly afterwards recollection came in a flash: the last time he had played for the Swifts disaster had overtaken him in the most unexpected manner. As a result of that trap set by Rahusen, he had not only been compelled to give up the game for several months, but he had suffered very considerable agony at the hands of his formidable enemy.

"What's the matter, Tiger?" roared a voice from the crowd, and, recalled to himself, Standish loped forward and joined the rest of the Swifts' team at the other end of the ground.

With the first impact of leather against leather—what joy in sport could be compared to "hitting" a football with full force and watching it speed like a brown bullet towards a corner of the net?—his mood changed. He forgot everything but the immediate job in hand. Above him was the clear autumn sky; the studs in his football boots bit into the immaculate turf—around him were a company of good fellows—ahead stretched ninety minutes of invigorating sporting contest. What more could any man want? He shook his head as

though clearing his brain of some faint nausea, and, trapping the ball as it came across from the outside left, rammed it past the Swifts' goalkeeper in a practice shot that sent the crowd at the back of the goal rocking in ecstasy.

"Good old Tiger!"

"That's the stuff, Tiger!"

"We want three to-day, mind!"

The admiring exhortations of the Swifts' camp-followers made him smile.

Firfield won the toss and took advantage of what little wind there was by attacking the Cowden Road goal.

The first five minutes of the game were scintillatingly fast. Firfield had countered the move of the Swifts in putting Tiger Standish at centre-forward by fielding for the first time McIlroy, their new centre-half from Glasgow Rangers. McIlroy was essentially a spoiler—which was one reason why the classic Glasgow side had allowed him to go—but, with his great reach and fourteen stone of weight, he could be a devastating factor in smashing up enemy attacks. In the previous night's sporting columns the critics had hinted at a dramatic clash between the two great antagonists.

So it proved. When, with breath-taking precision, the Swifts' forwards swept down to make their first raid on the Firfield goal, Tiger, beautifully nursed by Alec Swain—said by many good judges to be still the best inside-left in English football—was about to pivot in order to try one of his characteristic surprise shots, when he was swept off his feet!

"*Foul!*" yelled the crowd, but, as the centre-forward rose, it was noticed he was smiling. It had been a heavy charge but McIlroy had used nothing

except his weight. Still, the action had constituted a challenge which Standish intended to take up.

That first attack was beaten off as a direct result of Tiger's being grassed, but a couple of minutes later the home side raced again to the attack. Doubling and swerving, Swain swept out to his winger; the latter, feinting, deceived his half-back and raced on towards the corner flag. Progress being barred by the oncoming Birtles, the Firfield right-back, he side-stepped delightfully and gave to his partner. Swain, rushing up, pretended to take the ball, but, with a subtlety that brought a roar of appreciative cheering from the crowd, allowed it to pass to the waiting feet of Standish.

Tiger wasted no time. He had caught a glimpse, out of the corner of his eye, of his giant warder McIlroy, and knew this was no occasion to dally: almost as quickly as the ball came to him, he shot.

"Oh-h!"

The crowd had good reason for its groan, for the ball, speeding off the centre-forward's instep, flashed goalwards—but, grazing the cross-bar with incredible speed, went out of play. Whilst a mighty sigh of relief went up from the Firfield supporters, that throbbing "Oh-h!" from the twitching lips of the home crowd echoed again round the ground. A few inches lower, and the Swifts would have gained the incalculable advantage of scoring first.

It was noticed that, as he placed the ball for the goalkeeper, Birtles shook his head angrily like a lion aroused to fury. Captain of the side, the action was significant. McIlroy, looking his way, took the hint—and from now on acted the policeman so zealously that Tiger was shadowed wherever he went.

This supervision became so oppressive that at last he was forced to utter a mild remonstrance.

" Give me space to breathe, old boy," he remarked casually.

The reply was so pronouncedly Scottish that he was unable to translate it into anything intelligible.

And now the crowd joined in the friendly argument.

" Why don't you throw your arms round his neck and kiss 'im ? " yelled a wag.

Standing only a foot away, Tiger was able to notice the flush that crept into the centre-half's rugged features. McIlroy opened his lips to speak, and again something completely unintelligible to the Englishman issued therefrom.

For the past five minutes the balance of play had been reversed ; Firfield had been pressing almost continuously and, but for two or three brilliant saves by the Swifts' goalkeeper, the home goal must have fallen. But now, thanks to a neat clearance by the left-half, the ball came waist-high to Tiger. Pushing it downwards with his left foot Standish got the ball under control at almost the same instant as he evaded the scowling McIlroy, and rushed into his stride.

" TIGER ! TIGER ! "

Thousands of throats were hoarsely shouting his name. The riot of noise reverberated around the vast arena so that the Swifts' ground might have been peopled by a myriad-headed monster belonging to some deathless fable. The hope of the home supporters, which had become quenched during the previous five minutes, now flamed back into life.

" Tiger ! " they yelled again.

Birtles, the Firfield captain, was a footballer who used his brains as well as his feet. Before the game had started he had warned his co-defenders that Standish, who represented the most danger,

should be kept out at any cost, provided the tactics used were legitimate. The result could be seen now : falling back on their goal, the opposition presented a solid obstacle to the raider. Appreciating the position, Tiger, to the dismay of the less discerning in the crowd, commenced weaving a way towards the left touch-line. Swain, appreciating the subtlety of the manœuvre, beckoned to young Bastow, with the result that when Tiger passed the ball inside and received it again with a quick, deft touch, he was able to get a clear sight of the goal. True, it would be an almost oblique shot, but still . . .

In the meanwhile " Coke " Mahon was busy with his thoughts. He had gone to the Swifts' ground that afternoon with the fixed determination to earn the second portion of his killer's fee—and, now that his intended victim was only a few yards away, his hand began to itch. But when his groping fingers went into the right-hand overcoat pocket that held the gun whose handle had so many notches, he was dismayed to find that the weapon was—*missing* !

Turning with a snarl, he looked into the impassive face of a man wearing the soiled neckerchief and miscellaneous clothing of a British labourer. This man was elderly in appearance, and his sallow complexion spoke of a life spent at some close and unhealthy occupation. Moreover, the stubble of beard that fringed his uncompromising jaw went to convey the fact that all his available pence had been spent in the shilling which had enabled him to pass through the turnstile.

" Wot's the matter, mate ? " he asked in a strong Cockney accent.

" Coke " was nonplussed. For one thing, he was so full of conflicting emotions that he ~~found~~ any

kind of utterance impossible. When he had flung himself on the bed in that Soho room after leaving the Spotted Leopard, he had imagined this task to be one of the easiest he had ever accomplished. What could be simpler than killing a man when surrounded by a dense crowd? Who could be able to point him out as the assassin when standing with so many thousands of people? That poor mutt, "Doll" Gunn, whom he had disliked on sight and whose threats had roused him to such ribald laughter, once he had gained the security of his Soho bedroom—well, so much for *him*! That had been the burden of his reflections right up to this present moment. He wanted to get a clear sight of Standish before he fired—which he had intended to do from his pocket. There would be no sound and no smoke: all that would be witnessed would be the sight of the man falling to the turf. In the confusion that followed he would be able to get safely away.

That had been, as already stated, the burden of his thoughts. But, now that some one had stolen his gun, the confidence, strongly reinforced by a deep sniff of cocaine, rapidly disappeared.

"Wot's the matter with yer, mate?" asked the elderly working man again. "Can't you keep yer mind on the game—wot's the idea of turning rahnd an' spoilin' other people's pleasure?"

"Aw, go to hell!" snapped the mystified and frantically enraged killer.

The next moment he was sorry he had spoken. Into the eyes of his questioner had come a glint which presaged trouble. And in almost the same instant he experienced a sharp pain at the back of his right leg. His leg gave way beneath him and he reeled backward—straight into the arms of the elderly working man.

The latter seemed embarrassed.

"Let's get this feller out: he's been taken ill," he said to his companions. "'Ere, give a hand, somebody, will yer?"

That was all that "Coke" Mahon heard, for what followed was—oblivion.

"Goal!"

The crowd had become delirious with joy. It had seemed impossible for Standish to score from so acute an angle, but the ball had sped from his foot, so truly aimed that it might have been shot from a gun; the Firfield goalkeeper was beaten before he realised actually what had happened. It was not until the frowning Birtles rushed past him to pick the ball out of the back of the net that he was conscious of his defeat. And then, whilst the whole world seemed to have gone suddenly mad, he watched his captain boot the ball disgustedly towards the centre of the field, to which the referee was already pointing.

Delirium reigned for at least a minute. If "Coke" Mahon had not so mysteriously been rendered unconscious, of his surroundings, he might have disputed the statement that the British take their pleasures sadly; but, as it was, he was speeding away towards an unknown destination, seated, or, rather, lolling, in the back of a closed car, with—strangely enough—the British working man who had given the alarm sitting by his side—and keeping him covered with the very revolver he had, with such neat dexterity, abstracted from the Chicago visitor's pocket.

CHAPTER XII

A SURPRISE CALL

BENNY BANNISTER regarded his employer with as much admiration as his faithful eyes could portray.

" You played a blinder, guv'nor—three goals, and all of them beauties ! No wonder this 'ere cat wants to tell yer all about it ! "

He motioned towards Richard the Lion (half of whose magnificent coat had been passed on to him by his pure Persian father), who now came bounding into the room. Espying his master, he jumped first on to the table and then on to Standish's shoulder. Arrived at this point of vantage, he rubbed his face against Tiger's cheek, emitting meanwhile a deep, reverberating purr that sounded like all creation.

" Blinkin' dynamo, ain't he, guv'nor ? " commented Benny. " Well, I'll be seein' about 'is supper."

Left alone, Tiger was human enough to glance at the copy of the late edition of *The Star* which Benny had laid on the table. Across the back page stretched giant headlines.

" TIGER STANDISH'S TRIUMPHANT
RETURN."

" Tut, tut ! What a lot of fuss these reporters make about nothing at all, don't they, Dick ? "

The cat continued to purr.

Tiger, lowering himself into a chair, and now nursing the animal baby-fashion, reflected that the

world wasn't half a bad place. Whilst he had pretended to be unaffected by the newspaper's eulogium, looking back, he found a great deal of satisfaction in surveying that afternoon's game. After an absence of many months he had proved himself to be as good as ever—and the "bit of gristle" (here he patted the left knee which Sir Lessington Cress had examined with so much care a few days before) had stood the strain wonderfully. Heigho! he was a lucky devil to be able to live such a pleasant life. For the moment, all thought of anything not strictly appertaining to sport had been obliterated from his mind. Everything, that was, with the exception of the wife doing her duty in far away Worcester. After he had had a spot of grub he would put through a telephone call. Although she would be aware of the fact that he had scored three goals that afternoon, he knew what pleasure it would give her to hear his voice. Lucky devil indeed!

But, whilst he was ruminating thus felicitously, Benny made a somewhat lugubrious entrance. Bannister—as has already been stated, in this veracious chronicle—had the impression firmly fixed in his mind that the evil genius of his employer was that stark-looking individual known in Government circles as Sir Harker Bellamy, C.M.G., D.S.O. The latter appeared more than usually serious as he closed the door behind the disappearing Bannister.

"I had to see you, Tiger, my boy," he started at once, "because something unexpected has happened."

Tiger yawned. The present scene bore a close resemblance, in his mind, to the dramatic appearance of the demon in the pantomime. One moment he had been congratulating himself that the world

wasn't such a bad show after all—and straight upon that came this merciless ogre of his, looking more than ever like bad tidings from home.

"No rest for the wicked, I see," he returned. "I was just thinking how peaceful existence was, when you pop in like a dose of smallpox. What is it?"

"The Mole," used to the irreverent persiflage of his young agent, seated himself in a chair, meticulously pulled up his trousers' ends, pulled a battered briar from his pocket and helped himself to Standish's tin of tobacco.

"You played a great game this afternoon, young man," he stated with startling irrelevance.

Tiger stared. As well as he was aware—and he had known the speaker for a considerable time—the few hobbies of Sir Harker Bellamy did not include the attendance on Saturday afternoons at professional football matches. Yet, because he was always willing to learn any fresh truths, he beamed upon his visitor.

"Thanks a lot," he said. "The newspapers have gone ~~dark~~. You must have been reading them."

"I was ~~there~~," said Bellamy, with a second spasm of startling irrelevance.

"Beloved Chief!" chirruped Tiger, looking decidedly impish. "What induced you to drag your aged limbs to Highcliffe and expose your frail frame to the continuous assaults of the sporting proletariat? At your age you ought to take more care of yourself."

Bellamy passed the mockery by.

"I went there for a particular purpose—and, incidentally, I believe I saved your life."

Allowing this announcement to sink in, he struck another match, got the tobacco well ~~right~~, and

leaned back in his chair to watch the effect of his words.

This was surprising. Tiger caught hold of his shoulder with a grip that almost dragged his arm out of its socket.

"Exactly what do you mean by that, Chief?" asked Standish in an entirely different voice.

"Exactly what I say. You are apparently not aware of the fact yourself, but yesterday afternoon a once notorious Chicago killer, who goes under the name of 'Coke' Mahon, landed in Dover. He was carefully disguised, but"—here the speaker's voice became almost apologetic—"I happen to have a few friends in Soho amongst the criminal classes, and it was one of these—no less a person than the man who runs the Spotted Leopard café—'Doll' Gunn is his name; I must introduce you some time; he is, by the way, a staunch admirer of your football ability—passed me the word. I was able to pick up Mr. Mahon—who, recently arrived from Ronstadt, I thought might be worth watching—on his way to the match this afternoon, and, as a matter of fact, stood directly behind him. Naturally enough, he did not expect the elderly British working man, who had not shaved for a couple of days, to be attached to the British Secret Service—but he is considerably more knowledgeable on that point now.

"And now listen, Tiger: I have something very serious to say to you," Bellamy went on, lowering his voice.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MAN IN THE CORNER SEAT

THE information which Bellamy had brought took nearly forty minutes in the telling. After the chief of Q.1 had gone, Tiger rang the bell.

"It's you for a journey, my lad," he started—and Bannister, knowing by the concentrated look on his master's face that big events were in the offing, waited impatiently for further details.

"Where is it to be this time, guv'nor?"

"Paris. You go there to-morrow by the afternoon boat train, taking all my football kit. You'll carry a letter to an Italian joker named Rossi, who used to have a restaurant in Soho but now runs a small hotel in the Rue St. Marc. He'll look after you and make you comfortable. What's more, he cooks like an angel."

"I don't like angel's cooking."

"Well, you'll like this one's. And no more back-chat."

"All right, but what about you, guv'nor?"

"Silence, varlet! I've got different plans. You'll stay at Rossi's until you hear from me. Now, don't worry—everything will be all right." As always, when anticipating excitement, Tiger started to whistle. "By the way, I nearly got snuffed out this afternoon, according to Sir Harker Bellamy—quite like old times, isn't it, Benny?"

His devoted servant shook his head despairingly.

"When are you going to settle down and stop playing leap-frog with these blasted murderers?"

" Settle down, Benny ? Why, I ~~have~~ settled down. And that reminds me—put a phone call through to 21736Y Worcester, will you ? I've got to speak to Mrs. Standish."

Shaking his head, Benny left the room.

Tiger, having the normal prejudice of the perfectly healthy being against illness of any kind, loathed the very name of "disease," but on this occasion it gave him a distinct feeling of relief to hear from his wife's own lips that her aunt, although slightly better, was still not considered by the specialist to be out of danger.

" I can't leave her yet, darling," he heard his beloved say over the wire.

" No, of course you can't leave her. It's not to be thought of for a moment."

A gasp came.

" What do you mean, Tiger—aren't you missing me ? "

He chirruped like a male seraph.

" Like hell, sweet. But one must do one's duty, mustn't one ? "

" *Tiger!* "

" My most marvellous ? "

" You seem excited about something. Has anything happened ? "

He lied like a cabinet minister.

" Anything happened ? Not a thing, miraculous—except that I got three quite good goals against Firfield this afternoon."

" So I've read. Was the crowd very kind to you ? "

" They yelled their fool heads off."

A pause. Then :

" Are you being looked after all right ? "

Now was his chance.

" Well, things aren't exactly the same, you know. I say, Sonia," with an elaborate affectation of unconcern, " do you think you will be able to join me in Paris in time for the international match ? "

" Oh; darling, I hope so ! "

" Good ! I'm slipping over on Monday to see one or two people and get some practice. Must become acclimatised, you know—change of water and all that."

" Tiger, what a beautiful bluffer you are ! "

" Bluffer, angel ? What do you mean ? "

There was the sound of a stifled sob at the other end.

" Some day," Tiger heard his wife say, " I shall go to Sir Harker Bellamy's office and kill him with my own hands. . . . Darling, you *will* take care of yourself in Paris ? " She sounded breathless with anxiety.

" Of course. Up with the lark, do my daily dozen and never once forget Old Man Eno. And you're forgetting one thing, adorable."

" What's that ? "

" Why, that the death-rate in French football is not nearly so high as it used to be." He had the satisfaction of hearing the most gallant-hearted girl he had ever known break into a peal of laughter.

" And you'll write to me every day ? "

" Every day."

" Well, then, good-bye, you great big, lovable fool ! I shall be coming over just as soon as I can get away from here. Where will you be staying ? "

" I'll send you a wire."

" Darling—"

" What is it, sweet ? "

" Oh, how I love you ! "—and, as though afraid to trust herself to say any more, she rang off.

Tiger travelled down to Folkestone by car, driving himself. Benny had already departed, looking something like a wistful gnome.

Arrived at the coast town, Standish paid a visit to his old friend and occasional intelligence colleague, Captain John Conlan. The latter, having been severely beaten up in a Constantinople café whilst making certain inquiries on behalf of Q.I., had been given the post of port control officer upon leaving hospital. A useless left arm had incapacitated him for further secret service work—at least, of the kind in which Sir Harker Bellamy expected his men to specialise.

But, a cheery soul, Conlan greeted Tiger with the proverbial affection of a long-lost brother.

"Hell's bells!" he exclaimed as Standish entered the room. "Likewise, flaming tin-hats! What's brought you to our fair town, Tiger Tim?"

Standish, stretching his great length in an easy-chair, leisurely filled his pipe before replying.

"I'm running over to Paris to see to one or two things—and I wish you were coming with me, John. By the way, do you mind if I have the use of your room for half an hour?"

The port control officer raised his eyebrows.

"Going to do a little touching up?"

"You'll see."

Within the specified time, what emerged from Conlan's room made the interested port control officer first stare in surprise and then roar with laughter. Tiger, who had learned the art of disguise from a master-hand at the job, had so successfully sunk his own identity that it was a thousand to one chance, according to Conlan's expert evidence, that any one would recognise him even if he was on the watch.

Alistair Cameron was a red-faced Scot of fiftyish,

dressed in a plus-four suit of rather violent check material, and sporting a short, grizzled beard that in earlier life might have been of a distinctly ginger hue. Moreover, he paraded in front of him a paunch that spoke to years of good living."

"The trouble with me, John," said this apparition with an accent that any Scotsman would have accepted as being authentic Glasgow, "is that owing to my stomach I've got to shorten my swing."

"Too bad!" declared the port control officer. "May I ask if your passport is in order, Mr. Cameron?"

"Aye. You can have a look at it if ye like, mon," —and he handed the document over.

"I think I'll pass you this time. . . . Well, lad," with a change of tone, "the best of luck, and take care of yourself. I always say that when a man gets married he ought to chuck working for Bellamy—it's not fair to his missus."

"Don't you worry about me, John," was the equally sober response. "This is a big stunt, and I shouldn't like to be left out of it."

Alistair Cameron kept very much to himself on the boat going over and, arriving at Boulogne, he did not board the waiting Paris train, but walked along the waterside. Tiger imagined that he had covered his tracks very well, but he wanted to make certain. Turning left over the bridge, he boarded the bus labelled for Etaples—Paris—Plage and Le Touquet, thus following implicitly the plan discussed with Sir Harker Bellamy on the previous Saturday night.

"I don't want you to go by the ordinary Paris express," Bellamy had said. "After what I learned from Mahon just now, I've got no doubt whatever that other plans to put you out of action are being made. An attack might be attempted in the express."

No, my boy, get out to Etaples, and catch the slow train. However well one may be disguised, there is always a risk of being recognised.'

Listening to the greater mind, Tiger had nodded.

Arrived at Etaples, he went for a stroll through the town, and was amused to see the arrival of the old-fashioned steam tram outside the station entrance. But his amusement soon changed to a graver emotion. Three passengers alighted—one woman and two men; and as they walked to the platform, there was something about the woman's carriage which caused him to whistle softly. Although her face—or as much of it as could be seen by the poor station lights—conveyed very little to him, yet there was something vaguely familiar about this woman's walk as she passed along the platform.

What was Elsa Brendt—and if this woman wasn't the fair Elsa he would eat the deplorable hat he was wearing—doing at Etaples? Well, it all added savour to the game.

The three passengers from the steam tram appeared to be strangers to each other, but Tiger, in view of his discovery, decided to have a look-see at the two men. One was very obviously a native Frenchman; the other looked to him rather more like an Italian. They were both nondescript individuals, anyway—types who would pass in a crowd without exciting comment.

Anxious that the woman, at least, should not recognise him (he was thankful for his carefully padded jumper), he boarded the train when it arrived and, finding a corner seat, settled down with pipe and book.

At Amiens he decided on a little action. After making certain that the three Etaples passengers had not got off, he strolled down the gangway of the

train, puffing at his old briar and appearing to be amiably interested in every aspect of this bit of foreign travel.

Passing a second-class carriage, he noticed that the Frenchman and the woman he was more than ever willing to bet was Elsa Brendt had become friendly ; they were leaning towards each other and talking quickly. He would have liked to linger, but if this gab-fest was of the type he believed it to be, any person looking in at the participants would naturally excite suspicion. This woman was shrewd-witted—he had had pretty good evidence of that in the past—and it would be fatal to his plans if she penetrated his present disguise. So, with a smothered oath at having to pass on, he returned to his seat.

His first-class compartment had been empty when he left it, but during the five minutes' prowl it had gathered a fellow-passenger. What was more, this man was occupying his own seat.

It was not until he had opened the door that Tiger recognised the man as the fellow he had put down to be an Italian at Etaples.

He appeared to be sleeping so soundly that Tiger hated to disturb him, and so, taking the opposite seat, he picked up his book again and began to read.

The train gathered speed once again and thundered on its way.

Suddenly Tiger jumped up. His intuition, rendered acute by long experience, told him something was wrong. With his right hand closed over the handle of the revolver which rested in his coat pocket, he leaned forward and made a closer inspection of the sleeping man.

The latter was very still—ominously so. Moreover, as Tiger bent his head, he could detect no sound of breathing. Then, pulling back the man's

overcoat, he discovered the reason—this man was not sleeping : he was dead.

Protruding from his left breast, was the handle of a dagger.

The poor devil had been stabbed through the heart.

CHAPTER XIV

THE VANISHING TRICK

TIGER's experience had taught him to take a close interest in lethal weapons, and he regarded this particular specimen with a keen, professional scrutiny.

Without touching the handle—a somewhat ornamental affair—he decided that a long-bladed Italian stiletto had been used to give this poor devil his quietus.

' But when had it been done—and by whom ? The train had remained at Amiens for only about ten minutes. Of course, any number of murders could be accomplished within that space of time by a practised artificer, but still . . .

His speculations on the possible murderer—or murdereress—he did not forget that Elsa Brendt was on the train—were interrupted by a more personal turn of his reflections. This man had been stabbed whilst sitting in his own seat. Did he owe his life to the fact that he had decided on a prowl of inspection ? It certainly looked like it.

Dismissing this from his mind, he knew he had to act quickly. He didn't want himself burdened with a corpse, and the innumerable questions which would be rained on him if he gave the alarm. It was

tough luck on the dead man, but there was nothing for it but a vanishing trick. He had to get rid of that body as expeditiously as possible. Let some one else have the responsibility of explaining to the French authorities exactly how he had come across this grim relic. In spite of the fact that he could prove himself to be an accredited British Secret Service Agent, he could not afford to be held up whilst telling his story to the French police. No, this poor devil had to be disposed of.

But how?

With his brain racing, Tiger quickly came to a decision. There was only one thing for it—the corpse had to be thrown out of the window. There was no room under the seat, and he would be seen if he started dragging the dead man along to the lavatory.

Fortunately it was dark, and thanks to the German rolling stock which had been handed over to the French as part of the war indemnity, the train was running smoothly. This first-class compartment had one of the big-sized oval windows which opened easily and allowed plenty of elbow-room.

"I'm sorry, old boy," Tiger murmured as he picked up the body. . . .

A couple of minutes later he was alone once again in the compartment.

After keeping a sharp look-out in the gangway to see if any one had watched his sacrifying manoeuvre, he closed the door and gave everything a minute inspection. There was no blood on either the floor or the cushions.

Then, with a quickness that was characteristic, he stooped. A piece of paper that apparently had fallen from either the dead man's hand or one of his pockets could be seen lying beneath the seat which the deceased had recently occupied.

Picking it up, Tiger scrawled the few words written on it in French, and then put it carefully away in his pocket-book. The grave—or what amounted to the grave in this present case—had perhaps delivered up a most valuable secret.

At the Gare du Nord Tiger saw the woman he was now ready to swear was Elsa Brendt depart with her train companion in a taxi. He memorised the number in case it might prove valuable later on.

In accordance with the arrangements made by Bellamy, he then walked to the big bookstall and asked for the latest number of the famous American journal, *The Saturday Evening Post*. As he doubled up the bulky periodical, a man, after nudging his elbow, murmured “*Pardon, monsieur,*” and started to walk rapidly away.

Outside the station this man engaged a taxi, and was waiting with outstretched hand as Tiger climbed into it after him.

“I am Lecoitre, liaison agent of Illème Bureau,” he announced. “You are Monsieur Standish?”

“I used to be,” laughed Tiger. “At the moment I’m Alistair Cameron, a Scottish gentleman of leisure, with a twenty-three golf handicap.”

Whilst the French agent smiled at the jest, Tiger became serious.

“Something happened on the train,” he said, and proceeded to tell his story.

Lecoitre listened intently.

“Can you describe the man?” he inquired.

Tiger did so to the best of his ability, which was considerable.

“It must have been La Coste,” stated the French agent. “He had been to London on a special mission for the bureau—something, you understand,”

lowering his voice, "in connection with unmasking certain Ronstadt resident spies in England."

Tiger nodded. He might have said a good deal in reply, but remembering Bellamy's instructions not to put too much faith in any one he met belonging to Illème Bureau—at least, not until he had definitely assured himself on every point—he kept silent. There would be plenty of time for him to talk later on.

In the meantime, he allowed Lecoitre to get on with the melodrama.

Arrived at the hotel opposite the Gare du Nord, where Standish had decided to put up for the night, his companion asked him a final question.

"Did you happen to notice anything suspicious before you actually discovered the body?"

"Not a thing. Tell me something more about La Coste."

"He had been sent by my chief, M. de Chauny, first of all to Boulogne to make some investigations there in this very matter of which I have been telling you. What he saw at Boulogne made him cross to London. I have no doubt that he had obtained some valuable clues—La Coste was one of the best men in the bureau—and that he was killed because he had aroused suspicion in some way. Mon Dieu! These Ronstadt swine are clever—you had better look out for yourself whilst you are in Paris."

"I intend to," was the laconic comment.

"This afternoon I have been making certain inquiries myself," went on the Frenchman, "and I discovered that you are expected in Paris."

"The devil I am!"

"Yes, monsieur. It has caused much chatter and concern amongst the known Ronstadt agents—one man I overheard talking paid you the compli-

ment of saying that you were the most dreaded enemy their system possessed. You had a flair for always seeing things through to a successful conclusion. That is one danger you must be prepared to face—with our help, of course."

"Very good of you. What's another?"

"Well, the situation here in Paris is very peculiar at the present time. Although we have not yet been able to trace the headquarters—or, indeed, the principals—there is no doubt that an entirely new free-lance organisation exists for the purpose of collecting espionage details of all kinds."

Again Tiger could have said a lot; instead, he said nothing.

"These people, some of whom we believe to be stationed in Paris, will also be on the lookout for you, since you are known to be a prominent member of the British Counter-Espionage Department."

"You seem to be piling on the agony."

"It is for your good," asseverated the other.

"All right! That's enough for to-night. Thanks very much. I'll eat garlic at every meal so long as I am in France in order to keep inquisitive people away. And now, if you don't mind, I'll say good-night—I'm rather tired."

Whether it was the noisy trams that clanged outside his bedroom window for what appeared to be the better part of the night, or whether the remarks of Lecoître were responsible, Tiger could not decide. But anyway, he slept very badly that night. He liked a spot of risk—no one better—but the shade of odds in this present business appeared to be rather too heavy.

But with the arrival of the morning coffee and

rolls, he lit the first cigarette of the day with an unimpaired relish.

"A copy of *Le Petit Parisien*," he ordered from the *valet de chambre*.

"*Oui, monsieur, certainement.*"

Lying back in bed, the coffee and rolls finished, he lit another cigarette and gave himself up to the newspaper.

He had not long to look. There, splashed on the front page, were the particulars of the discovery he had expected. No name of the victim, whose dead body with a dagger piercing the heart had been found the night before by the side of the railway track north of Chantilly, was printed, and Tiger smiled when he noted the guarded tone which the report assumed about the whole affair. The bare details were published—nothing more.

"MURDER MYSTERY OF UNKNOWN MAN"

the report was headed.

Dressing, Standish descended and asked the concierge for a map of Paris and its environs. With this he retired to a quiet corner of the smoking-room and did some close studying. He was still wearing the hideous plus-fours and padded jumper of Alistair Cameron, and it did his heart good to overhear the whispered comments of a group of young French people, who evidently accepted him as the genuine British tourist.

He smiled in his horrible beard. Alistair Cameron—or, rather, the man behind his whiskers—could have told those youngsters a thing or two if he had liked.

Folding up the map, he handed it back to the concierge.

He had come to a decision.

CHAPTER XV

KUHNREICH IS ANGRY

KUHNREICH, the Iron Dictator of Ronstadt, was angry. There was sufficient reason. A stormy meeting of the cabinet had just terminated, and several of the ministers serving under him had spoken their minds plainly. Not that he had come under any direct fusillade of criticism himself—they knew his violent temper too well for that—but he had correctly read the signs: the state of the country was reflected in the report which Fischer, Minister of the Interior, and Schmidt, Minister of Finance, had presented. The unwelcome facts exposed by these two officials had been greeted with cries of execration—but both ministers had protested that the truth must be faced.

And the truth was that the sixty odd millions of people living in Ronstadt, well-drilled and disciplined as they had proved themselves to be during the past three years, were now demanding the results which had been so flamboyantly promised them in the past. It was agreed that Kuhnreich and those who served with him had brought the country out of a slough of fatalistic despondency. The dictator claimed, indeed—and with some truth—that he had created a new nation. But the era of prosperity, the entrancing vision of which had induced so many to tighten their belts and set a determined if grim face towards the future, was not yet arrived; and because it was so long overdue (according to the time-table which the Minister

of Propaganda had caused to be printed in his heavily-censored newspapers), a deep undercurrent of feeling had become apparent.

"The people are becoming impatient," Fischer had told the recently dispersed cabinet meeting. "They are demanding results."

Blunt words—so blunt that Kuhnreich's face had crimsoned whilst he glared at the speaker. The trouble was, he knew them to be true—the reports from his secret police, unpalatable though they had been to read, had been saying the same thing for many weeks now.

Time! That was what he was playing for—time in which to complete the military preparations that would assure a speedy and victorious end to the next war. Already the chemical branch of the army was fretting at the delay, but Schlater, his War Minister, had asked for another three months.

Three months! Would he last as long? Would the masses remain subdued for even such a short space as another twelve weeks? According to Fischer and Schmidt, it was doubtful.

Most of his schemes had been ambitious. The trouble was, so few of them had come off! Included in his visionary programme was the re-establishment of the former boundaries of Ronstadt. He had intended to lay claim to the provinces of Eupen and Malmedy, now part and parcel of Belga. The latter small but proud nation had always been hated by the ruling classes of Ronstadt (no matter of what denomination) for the courageous stand she had taken in the last war; but the real purpose at the back of Kuhnreich's brain in engineering this claim was to let it serve as an excuse for embroiling France (and incidentally Britain) in another war.

Kuhnreich was shrewd. He realised—none better

—that he was losing control over his followers, and that the only method to supply sufficient diversion from the economic distress apparent on all sides was to reinspire the national spirit. Ronstadt being from time immemorial a military nation, what better method could be employed than giving it out through his newspapers that their oppressed country could only find salvation and national dignity by going to war with its malignantly bitter enemies? That was the real purpose behind the feverish secret preparations that were being made for another holocaust, as well as for the expenditure of such huge sums of money on secret service organisation.

Time! Brooding darkly in his chair, he pondered over the advisability of staking all and forcing the members of his cabinet to see eye to eye with him in this matter. Two mental pictures followed each other in his distorted brain—the first portrayed him as the triumphant leader of an all-conquering, victorious Ronstadt, raised from the ashes of despair to the pinnacle of her former might and majesty. That was one. The other forced him to retoil. He saw himself at bay—in that very room—with a horde of enemies—and these belonging to the ranks of his own countrymen—pouring in through that door, smoking revolvers in their hands. . . .

Like a man mentally sick, he forced the horrific vision away and pressed his finger heavily on a bell-push.

“Crosber,” he ordered, as his secretary appeared. The fox-like face of the chief of secret police displayed perturbation as Crosber answered the summons.

“Yes, excellency?”

“Your news! Has anything arrived from London to-day?”

The tip of a tongue licked dry lips.

"I regret to announce, excellency, that the American, 'Coke' Mahon——"

"What?" he was sharply interrupted.

Crosber knew he would have to tell the rest.

"According to Voltag, Mahon made a mess of the job and has fallen into Bellamy's hands. If you remember, excellency——"

"Silence!" thundered the dictator.

Kuhnreich rose from his chair and began to pace feverishly up and down the huge room. Would nothing go right? Why was it that he had to depend on such fools? It was vitally important that both Bellamy, the Chief of the British Secret Service dealing with counter-espionage, and his chief agent, Tiger Standish, should be put out of the way. In the ex-Chicago killer he had imagined he had found an instrument who could not only be trusted but relied upon. Hadn't he promised to pay him well? And now—this. . . .

"The man has been taken prisoner?" Stopping his walk, he rasped the inquiry at the chief of secret police.

"Yes . . . it's unfortunate."

"What about the Brendt woman?" was the next question. "Has she succeeded in securing for us that aircraft invention?"

"She is doing good work towards that end," was the pedantic-sounding reply. "She has sent me a report to the effect that Standish has been ordered to attend the important Secret Service Conference in Paris on Saturday week. She has asked that she may deal with him personally, and I have given her permission. A remarkable woman that, excellency," went on Crosber, only too anxious to restore himself to favour again. "Five of Bellamy's best agents

were put away quite recently. She was directly responsible. Moreover, she was able to gather a good deal of valuable information from the young man in Bellamy's own office—Lancing."

"Yes, yes," he was impatiently reminded, "but that belongs to the past. What concerns us now is the future. Any further news of the——?"

At this point the speaker was interrupted; there was a loud knocking on the door, and without getting permission to enter, in strode General Galsteg, Kuhnreich's Minister for Foreign Affairs. He was a big, burly man with an autocratic manner, and showed signs of being tempestuously angry.

"I must see you alone, excellency——" he started.

Kuhnreich, although he hated this man, also feared him. It was common knowledge throughout Ronstadt that sooner or later these two would clash in a conflict that would rock the nation and bring perhaps anarchy and chaos in its train.

"All right, Crosber," he said in token of dismissal.

Never in the course of his highly-coloured career had Carl Crosber been more thankful for an interruption. He knew very well the question which Kuhnreich had been about to put to him. The dictator was on the point of demanding further information about the new mystery organisation which, according to the meagre information that had drifted into his office, had been established for the express purpose of gathering international secrets of all kinds and offering them to the highest bidder. Two problems exercised the cunning brain of Crosber. The first was that, although it was well known in the proper channels that Ronstadt were in the market for anything really valuable, no move had as yet been made by the heads of this international

clearing house to get into touch with him. That was perplexing ; but what was even more annoying was the continued disappearance of the agent, Herman Klein, whom he had sent into France three weeks before with the strict instructions to track this new possible menace to its source and report accordingly.

Klein, nosing about in the underworld of Paris, had sent daily reports for a week. After that, silence. .

Crosber returned to his office in a reflective mood. He knew that the awkward moment which he had just escaped was merely postponed. Kuhnreich would require definite facts from him about this organisation.

His one hope was Elsa Brendt. What a genius this girl was ! He was glad he had taken her into his service. Already she had more than earned the large sums he had paid into her account. It was Elsa Brendt who had supplied him with the information that five of the most experienced English agents had been killed off. It was Elsa Brendt, again, who had sent the first news—later confirmed by Voltag—that Tiger Standish, that perpetual thorn in his side, would be going to the French capital to represent England at the Allied Secret Service Conference.

Well, Brendt could be relied upon, he imagined, to deal with this pest. And when he was able to place before Kuhnreich definite proof that Bellamy's most valuable agent was no longer in the position to score further triumphs against Ronstadt—then he knew he would be fully restored to favour. Until then, his own position was decidedly precarious ; although Kuhnreich had not made any actual threat, he was able to read the dictator's mind sufficiently clearly to sense that, only half an hour before, he had

been standing on the very edge of a volcano. Like most men who led such a hazardous existence, he had many enemies, and these would be only too glad to rejoice at his downfall.

Drawing a telegraph form towards him, he coded a message to Elsa Brendt at her Paris address :

“ 20,000 MARKS IF YOU KILL TIGER STANDISH.
REPORT DAILY. CROSBER.”

He had just seen the messenger disappear through the door when the telephone bell rang. A voice, that sounded so thin that he knew it must be speaking from many miles away, stated that its owner was named Seitz.

Seitz ! That was the name of his chief agent in Belfort, the frontier town between France and Ronstadt, and one of the most heavily fortified areas in the whole of the neighbouring nation.

The voice spoke quickly for the space of perhaps two minutes. At the end of that time Crosber replaced the receiver with a force that almost carried the instrument to the floor.

The information was disconcerting. The dead body of Herman Klein had been discovered in a wood on the outskirts of the town early that morning—moreover, it had been identified by the French police as belonging to a well-known Ronstadt Secret Service agent.

Who had done the killing ? This new mystery organisation, details of which his agents found it so difficult to obtain ?

Telling his secretary that he must not be disturbed, Crosber concentrated on this problem.

But half an hour's intense thought brought him no nearer the solution of the puzzle.

Then, quite suddenly, he thought of a name.

CHAPTER XVI

THE CASE OF ADOLF RITTER

RITTER!

What memories the name conjured up in his mind! After the failure of the plot to ensnare a young British officer, Lieutenant Alan Dalrymple, of the Tank Corps, two years before, Ritter and all those associated with him had been dismissed from the secret service organisation under his control. That had been Kuhnreich's direct order and there had been no gainsaying it.

What had happened to this former Prussian officer who, when the revolution came, had sold his services to the new *régime*, he had not been able to discover. With so many other matters pressing urgently on his attention, he had not unduly bothered—not until now.

But the more he thought about the new mystery organisation, the ramifications of which threatened so much trouble in the near future, the more he became convinced that this man, who had flung a foul-mouthed defiance at him after being dismissed, must have some hand in it. That would be just like Ritter—to spend his time and energies in scheming for some revenge to placate his tortured soul.

Ritter! Well, he would look into the matter. . . .

Crosber's speculations were well founded—as he would have been able to see for himself if given the power to peep into a certain room in a derelict-looking mansion, standing in its own well-wooded

grounds on the outskirts of Billancourt. For it was in this very room—and at that self-same moment—that the man he had once employed under the name of Adolf Ritter was busily occupied reading documents.

The case of Adolf Ritter was peculiar—even in this age, when the sensational and bizarre have passed into the commonplace. After being ordered to leave Pé, following on the failure of the Lieutenant Alan Dalrymple plot,¹ he had slipped over the border and had hidden himself in the labyrinths of the Paris underworld. There he had found some choice company; degenerate white Russians, fugitive criminals from many countries, human scum and debris of all sorts and conditions. The plots that were hatched, the conspiracies that were schemed over the dirty, wine-slopped, marble-topped tables in those Montparnasse cafés. . . . He had sat and listened, had collected what he thought was worth while, and at last had started on the task of retrieving his own personal fortunes.

The idea which burst on his brain with the full splendour of genuine inspiration one night required a good deal of spadework, but amongst the lost legions with whom he now spent his days and nights he found many who would serve his purpose. Naturally enough, discretion had to be used—a false step, a careless word overheard, and all would be lost—but amongst the *habitues* of the hell's kitchens that he had got to know so well there was an abundance of prospective recruits.

Then, in the midst of his schemes, Elsa Brendt had paid a visit to the Red Rat one night, had smiled in recognition, and had given him a lift in her own car to the apartment in the Rue St. Jeanne.

¹ See *The Traitor*.

He had been reluctant to talk at first—this woman still worked for Crosber, he had heard—but after a time she had gained his full confidence. What was more, she had shown herself possessed of so much organising genius that he had listened spell-bound. Used to all types, he was able to place this woman in her true category—either actuated by a sense of abnormal excitement or smarting under the fact that she was not given sufficient scope by her present paymasters, Elsa Brendt had become a double spy. She declared herself to be as willing to sell Crosber, her direct chief, as she was willing to sacrifice any one else to her vaunting ambition.

They had sat until the early morning talking, talking, talking.... And at the end an arrangement had been made between them. With Ritter as the nominal head, a free-lance organisation that might spread within an incredibly short space of time to gigantic proportions was to be initiated. Recruiting spies of experience from every quarter, the information they were able to gather would be placed on offer to the highest bidder. There were risks, of course, but both these people had been used to risk all their lives.

Ritter's first task was to discover suitable headquarters. Elsa Brendt had suggested Switzerland—she had put in a good deal of high-speed work at one time and another in Basle and Berne—but Ritter, although giving polite attention to her remark, had insisted that the best plan would be to "settle" near Paris. When he had expatiated at some length on the advantages to be derived from this base, the woman had nodded in agreement. Billancourt was already full of *émigrés* of every description.

"But you must get a cast-iron alibi," she wound up. This Ritter proceeded to do. By what might have seemed a strange series of coincidences, he managed to remake the acquaintance, a few days after this momentous interview, of the one-time famous inventor, M. Gaston Coret.

The world of science had almost forgotten Gaston Coret—fame being such an evanescent quality these days—but the man who had perfected so many electrical marvels of the past was still working, although the outside world gave him little thought. The owner and occupier of a twenty-roomed mansion—which had been his home for the past forty years—he lived now in a small, isolated wing, and worked in the long, one-storied building built in juxtaposition with the mansion itself. This laboratory had seen the origin of many of those inventions from which the world was benefiting to-day without giving any heed to the man who had wrested them, by brilliance of brain and unceasing endeavour, from the maw of Nature. Yes, Coret was still inventing, but the newspapers had neglected him for so long that, with all his contemporaries died out, practically no one—except a very few intimates—knew that he was still living. Even amongst those intimates he was regarded as being very eccentric and more than a little mad.

A shrewd business man in the past, he had amassed a considerable fortune. In the district where he lived he was known to lead a very secluded life, enjoying no society but his own and having few if any visitors.

As soon as he renewed the acquaintance of this scientific recluse, Ritter had come to a certain conclusion. Coret would serve his purpose admirably. The rooms of the mansion, which had been allowed

to fall into disuse, would be very suitable as the headquarters of the new free-lance espionage organisation which he intended to forge as a weapon against the present rulers of Ronstadt.

Altogether, he regarded the day on which he called on this eighty-five-years-old inventor as being a very important date. It was only after he had taxed his brain to the limit of its power that he was able to recall a circumstance that should prove extremely valuable in the present connection. When working for the Ronstadt Secret Service, he had once been detailed to interview a man who had formerly acted as Coret's valet. Actuated by the lust for money, this faithless servant had approached the Ronstadt Government with the object of trying to dispose of some of his master's blue-prints.

It was by this means Ritter had first established an acquaintanceship with Coret. Playing his cards well, he had gradually wormed his way into the confidence of the inventor—so shrewdly did he manoeuvre, indeed, that not many weeks had passed before he was instrumental in getting rid of the very man who had introduced him to Coret!

During the intervening time he had kept in close touch with the inventor on the principle that one day the old man might serve some purpose very usefully. And so it was that when Elsa Brendt, sitting with him in that flat in the Rue St. Jeanne, had said, "You must get a cast-iron alibi," he had told her about this acquaintanceship.

"Excellent!" she had declared, and he had gone to work.

It was in one of the best rooms in the inventor's mansion that he now sat working, at an old-fashioned, but good writing bureau.

And he was engaged in very evil things.

CHAPTER XVII

THE HOUSE OF THE JACKALS

HE was interrupted in his congenial task of signing what amounted to the death warrant of a proved enemy to his new organisation when, from a secret panel near the fireplace, there stepped into the room a radiantly beautiful woman.

He rose to his feet immediately.

"*Elsa!*" he cried.

The visitor, disregarding the warmth of feeling in his voice, merely nodded before sinking into a chair on the other side of the work-table.

"Well?" she asked..

"Everything is going well," he returned. "Coret is now practically a prisoner in this—his own—house, although he does not suspect it. I am supreme master here. There are only two of his servants left and they are just puppets in my hands." He made a movement with his fingers as though breaking pieces of straw.

"What about the rest of the staff?"

"I have replaced them with a few members of our own organisation—the destined shortly-to-be-illustrious Schakalbande, or what the English would call 'The Jackal Band.' Poor old Coret thinks I am taking charge on his behalf! But tell me," he broke off; "how are things in London—Standish and that crowd?"

The woman took a long, slim gold case from her vanity bag and lit a cigarette before replying.

"Standish is now in Paris," she announced.

"He is down to attend the Allies' Conference on Saturday week. I got that much from young Lancing, the assistant personal secretary to Bellamy himself. On the day following he will play in the International football game against France. You see, my dear Ritter, he is quite a personage. You ought to be careful of him—I heard in London that he was out to avenge Alan Dalrymple. . . . No doubt you recall the name."

The listener leaned back in his chair. There was a bleak smile round his thin lips.

"I confess, Elsa, that what you have just said compels me to take an interest in this young man. I have never had the pleasure of meeting him, as you know, but the very fact that he is supposed to be the ace of the British Secret Service is sufficient for me. That, and the further knowledge, of course," with a lascivious look at the woman, "that he happens to be an old adversary of yours. He has no suspicion, I hope," a sterner note creeping into his voice, "of your association with the Schakalbande?"

"None whatever. So far as he suspects, I am merely a paid agent of Ronstadt."

"Then why should we concern ourselves about him?" asked Ritter.

"Because I am convinced that during his stay in Paris he will try to learn something about our organisation here—and if he does, being of a very curious turn of mind, he will wish to carry his investigations further. Should he do so, I have a very interesting piece of business to propose."

"Tell me."

"It is this," she went on. "I happen to know that Crosber would pay a very useful sum of money for the body, dead or alive, of the Hon. Timothy Overton Standish. Suppose I could induce him to

pay us a visit here, do you think that you could keep him safely?"

The man smiled. It was the smile of a human jackal.

"I am quite convinced on that point, my dear. During the time you have been away I have been carrying out several—shall I call them improvements? Old Coret has offered no objection to my taking charge of his menage, and as a matter of fact, he has quite enjoyed dabbling amongst the structural alterations which I have told him I have found necessary to make inside the house. You must remember," the speaker went on, "that his great age makes him more or less half-witted. However, to continue: the basement of this house is now a small but efficient electric power station. In point of actual fact, it is a private generating station complete in every detail. The French Government"—here Ritter's face scowled—"very graciously permitted the installation of the necessary machinery to be made years ago in order to facilitate Gaston Coret's inventions. The dynamos and batteries are housed in separate compartments in the basement, and experts, a number of whom are members of the Schakalbande, declare the whole plant to be very efficient.

"Naturally enough, my dear," Ritter continued, "I have never lost sight of the fact that, as our business improves, we must face the possibility that this stronghold of ours may be visited by inquisitive people. It is in order that, should such gentry arrive, they may be adequately provided for that the place now teems with electric gadgets of all sorts. For instance, that chair," pointing to a comfortable leather affair placed to the left of the visitor.

" What's the matter with it ? "

" Nothing, my dear Elsa—nothing. Only, if you had been indiscreet enough to sit in it, you would have found that it was a very ingenious mantrap. That couch, too," pointing to a companion piece resting by the side of the wall, " if any one sits on it—you notice it is placed beneath the wall-safe—well, the most alarming things might happen. I shouldn't be at all surprised if a verdict of ' Sudden but accidental death ' were returned at the inquest—not that we should have any inquest, of course.

" It has been all very amusing. Under the pretence of making the house secure against burglars, I have got the inventive part of old Coret's brain to work, and it has delighted him to turn this house into a place so full of danger for an intruder that he might well suppose he had visited Bedlam itself."

" And you have complete control of the whole house ? "

" Absolutely complete. And further ' improvements ' are always being made. Amongst our crowd now there are many clever craftsmen, whom from time to time I set to work in devising secret entrances and exits both to the house and to all the rooms. There are many trap-doors and other ingenious getaways in case the house should ever be raided. A tunnel so well concealed that it is practically impossible ever to be discovered leads from the dining-room (the fireplace end) to the neighbouring cemetery. and in the event of our wishing to dispose of any traitor . . . well, Elsa, I leave the rest to your imagination."

" Where would you keep Standish if I could bring him here ? "

Ritter gave the matter some thought.

" Well, I suppose our *pièce de résistance* is the old laboratory. This, with its strongly reinforced basement room, would make a prison as difficult to escape from as any in France. I have walled off part of the laboratory nearest to the house, so that it now forms an independent secret room. It is protected with strongly reinforced cement and steel-lined, so that it is now fireproof and forms a huge strong-room, the locks of which are fitted with electrically-controlled combinations. That is where, Elsa, I keep the secrets that are being brought to us every day. There is not a nation in the world that would not give a great deal to see what reposes in my strong-room. Just one final word and I will stop telling you of the hidden treasures of this mansion. The whole of the mechanism of the gadgets and of the defence of the house is primarily based on electricity obtained from the private generating plant. So that, you will readily see, there can be no fear that our supply might be cut off or any other little awkwardness intervene."

The speaker's manner changed.

" We will now talk about serious business," he continued. " Did you see anything of La Coste ? "

The woman's reply was short but decisive.

" La Coste is dead," she told him.

" Dead ? "

" He was becoming dangerous. He followed me to Boulogne and then to London. What he told the British Secret Service I do not know, but I noticed him once talking to Sir Harker Bellamy in a small Soho restaurant. Anyway, on the way back, I decided, with Pradel, that La Coste must be got rid of. It was managed at Amiens. Pradel had wired to a man he knew, and when La Coste got off to get a cup of coffee—poor man, he had been

unable to eat any dinner because he was so busy watching us—a shadow slipped round in front of him, and before he could defend himself—whsst ! Oh, it was very neatly done—one stab through the heart with a long-bladed stiletto."

" And no one suspected ? "

" Only a Scottish-looking gentleman into whose seat La Coste was propped after he was dead."

" That was very risky, surely ? "

" The railway officials thought he was merely drunk."

Ritter's eyes sparkled with admiration.

" Elsa, you are a marvellous woman," he declared.

She put out a hand because of the light that had suddenly leaped into his eyes. However close their business relations might be, she had no wish to encourage Adolf Ritter as a lover. Already he was showing signs in that direction—and the man being physically distasteful to her, there would inevitably be an explosion if he persisted.

So she changed the subject abruptly.

" Let me see the accounts," she urged.

For the next half an hour these two might have been the joint managing directors of a very prosperous business concern " going over the books."

At the end of that time the visitor rose.

" We appear to be prospering. Congratulations, partner ! "

Ritter bowed over the extended hand.

" ' Partner ' ? " he returned. " It is a significant word, I hope."

" I shouldn't hope," the woman rejoined abruptly.

" I was speaking in purely a business sense."

After she was gone, the man she had congratulated sat biting his nails. In all his forty-five years of life he had never wanted a woman so ardently as he

desired this female spy whom he had taken into partnership. But unless her mentality changed, his quest appeared hopeless. A man who had experience of women of all types and classes, he had seen sufficient in Elsa Brendt's face, when he uttered the one word "partner," to be assured on that point.

Was it possible that she had fallen in love with that fellow Standish? The history of espionage, reeking as it did with unexpected happenings of all kinds, was rich in precedents. If that was the case, he would know very well what to do should the Englishman—a potential enemy in any case, because of his connection with the British Secret Service and because of his friendship with young Dalrymple—decide, voluntarily or otherwise, to pay a visit to him. It would be his dead and not his live body that would be delivered to Crosber. . . .

As the name of his hated enemy flashed into his mind, Ritter bethought himself of the Ronstadt agent, Klein, who had been killed in that very room by his own hand, and whose body had been taken in a closed car to Belfort so that it might be assumed that his assassination was due to French means.

Leaving the house by the same secret doorway as she had used in entering, Elsa Brendt regained her car and started to drive back towards Paris. There was a great deal of work for her to do that day, and she was dining with Le Comte de Crespigny at the Château Madrid.

She decided that her visit to Adolf Ritter had been, on the whole, satisfactory. So far as strict business was concerned, she had reason to congratulate herself on how the profession of spying was prospering. The knowledge paid a compliment to

the acute business sense which had caused the formation of the Schakalbande.

Of course, she was playing with fire. Ritter was in love with her—at least, he wanted her body—and if she continued to repulse him he might turn nasty. He might even contemplate giving her away to Crosber. That old fox could snap viciously on occasions, and once he received definite proof that she was a double spy, he would send half his available force into France, if necessary, to have her, "removed."

Recalling Ritter's lascivious look brought another memory—the sight of Tiger Standish standing before her in the Beaumont Grill in Piccadilly a few days previously. This was the man whose arms she wanted to feel round her. She wanted to seduce Standish as she had seduced Victor Lancing—but it would be a very different problem, she knew.

Still, if what Lancing had told her an hour before he became panicky and shot himself could be relied upon, Standish was now in Paris, and, if the gods were kind, she would soon be in touch with him. With a swift rush of blood to the brain, she realised that she had a far more potent inducement in regard to Tiger Standish than the 20,000 marks offered her by Crosber for his death. She wanted the man *alive*. . . . She might hate him professionally, but the very thought of his physical nearness set her skin tingling. . . .

At that moment, slowing down at the cross-roads, she made way for a small car in which sat a huge man, sporting a reddish beard.

"Thank you," he said in broad Scots as he swept by.

Elsa Brendt stared after him.

CHAPTER XVIII

ALISTAIR CAMERON IS INQUISITIVE

TIGER chuckled in his villainous beard. Lady Luck had given him a nudge, and he was determined to profit by his good fortune. Whether or not Elsa Brendt had recognised him did not appear to be material at the moment ; it was enough for his purpose that he had recognised *her*.

That poor devil of a French Secret Service agent who had died as the result of a knife-thrust in the heart, and whose body he had been forced to deal with so unceremoniously between Amiens and Paris, had served his purpose well : the piece of paper which had dropped either from his hand or from his pocket (the latter most probably) had given him a clue. And the fact that he had just passed Elsa Brendt on the way back from the house that he proposed to visit, gave confirmation to his "hunch."

What was this Château Saint-Ange ? Was it the headquarters of the Ronstadt Secret Service in France, or had it an even more sinister meaning ? Did it serve, for instance, as a hideaway for the new mystery espionage organisation concerning which Lecoître had given him details at the Gare du Nord—the same organisation that, acting on the definite instructions of Bellamy, he had been specially despatched to Paris to investigate ? In any case, he badly wanted a look-see—and he was going to have one. That was why he had asked the concierge at the hotel the previous morning for a map of Paris and its environs.

As he drove along the straight, poplar-lined road in his ridiculously small two-seater which he had hired, he gave a further thought to the liaison agent of the *IIIème Bureau*. Tiger was quick in forming impressions, and he rarely found that these required revision: he had not liked the look of this fellow Lecoître—the man had shown himself possessed of two bad habits: he moved his eyes shiftily and he talked too much. The trouble was, he knew him as the masquerading Scotsman, Alistair Cameron: he would have to watch out. Still, he couldn't waste any further time bothering about Lecoître now; more important things were afoot.

Another quarter of an hour's journey brought him to a pair of iron gates opening on to a badly neglected drive. This led for a distance of perhaps fifty yards straight up to the front door of a derelict-looking, small mansion. Almost obliterated by age on the stone pillars supporting the gates on either side was the name "Château Saint-Ange."

As the car stopped there came from the small lodge to the right of the gates a man dressed in some kind of faded uniform. A servant evidently.

Tiger, who had spent several hours in making his inquiries in Paris, now addressed the fellow in execrable French.

"Does M. Gaston Coret live here?" he asked through the gates, which the man had not attempted to open.

The servant gave him a sulken stare.

"M. Coret is indisposed," he replied.

Tiger had expected as much and was prepared.

"Nevertheless," he rejoined, "I find it necessary to see him. I have brought M. Coret," he went on in his schoolboy French, "a message from an old friend of his in England."

The servant was intractable.

"M. Coret receives no one; he is too ill."

The visitor started to pluck at his beard, and then, remembering the spirit-gum, fortunately desisted in time.

"You are insolent," he said. "Take my message to M. Coret immediately or I will have you reprimanded."

Whether it was the beard-effect or whether there was something in the speaker's voice that carried perturbation to the other, the result was that the man adopted a different tone.

"I will telephone to the Château," he stated—and turned away.

Five minutes later Tiger stood facing a man who described himself as the secretary of the aged inventor. Unless he was wrong in his guess, Tiger decided that this was the very man he had come forth to see. He called himself "M. Reclus," but from the description he had been given he knew him to be Adolf Ritter, a former Ronstadt Secret Service agent, and the man responsible for the unscrupulous plot—a plot that had failed—against Alan Dalrymple, a former pal of his in the Tank Corps, who had never quite recovered from the messy business, although a couple of years had since passed.

What was this man Ritter doing at the address that had been written on the piece of paper he had found beneath the dead body of the French Secret Service agent La Coste? Things were becoming interesting.

"I regret, M. Cameron," said the supposed secretary, "that my employer, M. Coret, is too ill to receive any visitors. He is a great age, you know—

he was eighty-five last birthday—and his medical adviser has forbidden him excitement of any kind. I trust you will understand."

"Perfectly. Will you tell him that Mr. Vicars Kent"—at the mention of the famous English inventor, whose recent work, carried out under the auspices of the British War Office, had revolutionised that important military arm, the modern machine-gun, the listener's eyes had opened—"sends his best respects to his most distinguished confrère and will be writing to him soon."

"I didn't know that M. Coret had the pleasure of M. Vicars Kent's friendship."

This was a bit of a poser, but Tiger took it, as he did most other difficulties, in his stride.

"At eighty-five one is apt to be secretive. Have you not found that so with M. Coret?" he returned.

After that conversation languished. At least on the part of the supposed secretary. M. Reclus evidently wished to get rid of the caller as quickly as possible.

"I am sorry to intrude myself on you any further, M. Reclus," continued the visitor, "but it happens that I had a double purpose in calling here to-day."

"Yes?"

"Yes," repeated the Scotsman. "Is it true," he went on, "that this house is for sale?"

M. Reclus started back as though a hornet was hovering.

"For sale? Certainly not! The supposition is utterly absurd."

"Well, then, I must have been misinformed," was the unruffled comment. "You see," he went on, in an apparent burst of confidence, "I intend to take up my residence in France—that cursed income tax, you know!—and so, when I crossed the other

day, I began to take immediate steps to acquire a desirable property. I understand that Billancourt is full of people like myself—those to whom La Belle France has called with no uncertain voice—and, when the estate agents in the Rue St. Honoré told me that they were hoping shortly to have the negotiation of this very house, why, I thought I would just pop out and look it over, and so kill two birds with one stone. Extraordinary coincidence, wasn't it, that this very house should belong to the man to whom I had been entrusted with a message in sweet friendship's name?"

His blather, improvised on the spur of the moment, had the effect of making his listener choke.

"What is the name of those agents?" M. Reclus exploded.

Tiger did some fretting with his beard.

"Now, damn it, I must confess I have forgotten. . . . They gave me their card but I must have lost it. And these French names are so confusing to a Scotsman like myself. . . . So I can't have the pleasure of looking over the place?"

Ritter was not very good at this game. He could not keep his temper in check.

"You are trying to make a fool of me," he cried.

"Make a fool of you, my dear fellow? Certainly not! Oh, by the way," the visitor went on, as though the thought had suddenly occurred to him, "I was told at my hotel that this was rather a dangerous part to visit. So what did I do? I thought it wise to go to *l'a Sûreté* (my eldest brother has a friend there amongst the inspectors) and leave them this address. I am a simple-minded sort of chap and I thought that if anything *should* happen . . . why, it would be just as well, don't you agree,"

that the police should know actually where I had gone."

"Your movements are of no interest to me; please get out."

At this very critical moment Ritter failed himself. He knew what he should have done; he should have called this man's bluff. Even if his visitor had left the message with either the police or the French Secret Service, he—

But irresolution mastered him. He dared not take a risk. Already, it seemed, the house was under suspicion—how the devil had the fool got the address?—and if he made a false move now, all his plans might be blown sky-high.

He recovered himself with an effort.

"I deeply regret my impoliteness," he said, "but I have had a most trying morning. Will you please excuse me now, M. Cameron . . . I have to go to my employer.

"Certainly, my dear fellow—as the house isn't for sale, I decidedly won't take up any further time. Sorry to have bothered you. You won't forget to give M. Coret my message?"

"I will deliver it myself."

With that the two parted. Ritter watched the tall form leave the room with such a tumult of mingled emotions that he almost cried out under the strain.

As soon as Standish reached the door, a man appeared.

He made no objection to this servitor's piloting him to the gates at the end of the drive, for the very simple reason that he had formed certain conclusions about the Château Saint-Ange—and hoped to verify them at a later—and more convenient—time.

When it was dark for preference.

Back in Paris, Tiger laughed at the frowning face of the faithful Benny.

"Well, Frost-bite, what's the matter with you?" he demanded.

"Matter with me, guv'nor?" returned Bannister. "Can't I 'ave me private thoughts?"

"Not so long as you're working for me, you can't. Come on, out with it: what's on your mind?"

"Well, guv'nor," came the confession, "if you must know, I don't care for this place."

"Hasn't Rossi been treating you all right?"

"Oh, I've got nothing to say against 'im—at least, so far as the grub's concerned."

"Then what is it?"

"Well, there's too much pryin' going on 'ere."

"Prying? Consolidate yourself, boy!"

Benny, grinning at the memory of the lamented departed, Alexander and Mose, of hilarious memory, proceeded to explain.

"It's that Rossi," he went on. "He was so proud of knowing you and you sending me 'ere that 'e's been tellin' everybody that comes into the place. If you ask me, we'd better move, guv'nor—at least, you'd better, because it'll soon be all over Paris that Tiger Stāndish is staying in this hotel."

His employer sighed.

"The inevitable price of fame, Benny. All right, get the stuff together, while I spill a few words of wisdom into friend Rossi's ear. By the way, what do you think of the hearth-rug?" fingering his beard tentatively.

"'Orrible! It makes me feel sick, guv'nor."

"In short, the general effect is lousy? Well, well! But I have carried it about long enough; I'm suspecting it of harbouring moths. It's going to disappear right now."

"Thank God for that! What is it to be next time?"

"You'll discover when you see it." With that he departed in search of the zealous but indiscreet Italian hotel keeper.

CHAPTER XIX

VOLTAG SEES DANGER

EMIL VOLTAG was sitting in that quiet house in the quiet Kensington street which he rented under another name.

He had a good deal to think about.

Dupeyron, the renegade Frenchman, who took a strange delight in the curious practices of drenching his person with perfume and painting his fingernails a deep scarlet, had just called. And what Dupeyron had told him was highly perturbing.

Although a degenerate, Dupeyron was valuable. Because of his habits and idiosyncrasies he was often able to bring to that house in Kensington a good deal of worth-while information. Many startling facts concerning the inner lives of the owners of some of the big names in Mayfair and Belgravia had been passed on to Voltag in that very room. And Emil Voltag, being by nature painstaking, had always entered the said particulars in a certain book the covers of which were black. This he kept in a safe, the combination being known only to himself.

"I wonder . . ." now mused the Chief of the Ronstadt Secret Service in London; "I wonder . . ." He was referring to the doubt which Dupeyron,

half an hour before, had planted in his mind. It concerned Elsa Brendt.

"I believe that woman is double-crossing us," Dupeyron had said, and proceeded to tell the result of a visit to Soho the night before. It was in one of the café bars of the headquarters of the underworld that, without straining his ears, he had been able to overhear the name of Voltag's chief female spy mentioned. Continuing to listen intently, he had gathered that Elsa Brendt was in the position to give any renegade Secret Service agent lucrative employment, provided he or she could be relied upon to render compensating service.

The extremely unsatisfactory face of the Frenchman slid into a nauseating furtiveness.

"Suppose—I only say 'suppose'—the job in question concerns this new organisation? It wouldn't be too good from our point of view, would it, now?"

Voltag, staggered at the news, had nodded. He had mingled feelings on the point. Although he had sufficient experience to place at its true worth the loyalty of an international spy like Elsa Brendt, yet he could not bring himself to believe that the woman would run such an appalling hazard as to show treachery to that monstrous pair, Crosber and Kuhnreich. Why, they would have her torn limb from limb, once proof was forthcoming. . . .

For appearances' sake, however, he had led Dupeyron to believe that he did not attach much value to his information.

"That Elsa Brendt should be a double-crosser is out of the question; she wouldn't take the chance," he stated.

"Well, I thought you ought to know," was the Frenchman's comment.

Once he was left alone, Voltag reviewed the position carefully. He had no particular liking for Elsa Brendt ; as a matter of fact, he hated her, jealousy providing the motive. She had been sent to London over his head by Crosber. He had not wanted the woman. The reason she had been sent was that that old fox in Pé had decided that he (Voltag) had failed in a very important and delicate mission.

This had directly concerned the news of an important invention by an alien-born inventor now residing in Great Britain. As a result of this man's researches, heavy bombing aircraft was likely to be revolutionised entirely. According to the information sent from Pé, the inventor was working on the following lines : a very lightly-weighted colloidal mill had been practically perfected by him, which could be installed in the bombers and worked by induction from the engine. The mill performed a quadruple action, and the fusing of petrol and water into a highly volatile mixture had been discovered. This hitherto impracticable possibility had caused great interest throughout the world of science, especially when it was discovered that the mixture gave increased mileage and greater general efficiency. The invention also covered a device whereby the moisture which formed on the wings of an aeroplane when in flight at high altitudes could be collected, filtered and solidified into ice-blocks, which could then be stored in a refrigerator in the machine until required. In this way the petrol storage in the bombers was considerably cut down, thus increasing the bomb-carrying capacity—the water was collected as the machine was in flight and the mixture of petrol and water could be effected when required in the air. The most carefully kept secret in the whole

invention was the stabilising fluid that was necessary to maintain the constituents of the mixture in permanent suspension.

Crosber had added that many Ronstadt scientists, working in the Government-subsidised laboratories, had made great headway towards solving the mixture of the petrol and water, but they had failed so far to discover any suitable stabiliser fluid. It was this secret which Kuhnreich required very urgently.

He (Voltag) had been given a month to secure the necessary information. But he had found that every avenue was closed to him ; this, at the moment, was the most jealously guarded secret the British Government possessed.

When he had tactfully conveyed as much to his superiors in Pé, Crosber had exploded into a rage and told him that he would be superseded. Although this threat had not been carried out in its entirety, the entrance of the woman Elsa Brendt on the scene had humiliated him beyond measure.

His chagrin had been considerably increased when he learned that the woman had been placed in sole control of this mission—and that she seemed likely to bring off the *coup*. It was for that purpose that she had got hold of young Lancing, the secretary of Sir Harker Bellamy of the Q.1 Department. It was through him that she learned that the British Air Ministry, with its usual ca' canniness, although expressing great interest in this invention, had not yet—credible as it sounded!—definitely clinched the details with Bruno, the Roumanian-born scientist. True, the R.A.F. experimental section were still carrying out tests with the new mixture.

Elsa Brendt had not troubled to show him much deference from the moment of her reporting for

duty at the Kensington house. It was evident she knew her value and was determined to live up to her new position. This much he had been able to gather from her in an unguarded moment: the British Government, although fully realising the value of this new invention when perfected, with characteristic procrastination, and its typically mean attitude to inventors, had refused so far to pay M. Bruno the big price he naturally demanded for his secret. This much the woman had learned through channels suggested by Victor Lancing.

One fact that the woman spy had not been able to obtain in any detail, however, was that the Air Ministry, aware that the civil aeroplanes in use on mail routes already possessed manifold advantages over their almost obsolete military machines, and with typical narrow-sightedness, did not feel inclined to allow private aircraft firms to benefit from this latest discovery, to their further disadvantage.

After she had gained her success with young Lancing, Elsa Brendt had endeavoured to get into touch with M. Bruno himself; but the inventor had refused to hold any communication whatever with either the woman herself or any of her agents. Apparently, he had suffered some personal indignity in the past when staying in Ronstadt, and had never forgotten the slight.

This was the position, then, up to the time that Elsa Brendt had left London for Paris. Her domineering attitude in regard to the possible "disposal" of Tiger Standish had further infuriated Voltag. Now, as he ruminated over the position, he could not help querying whether the attitude Elsa Brendt had taken up with regard to the British Secret Service "ace" had not been actuated in some measure

by recent events. In other words, had she been successful in obtaining the secret of M. Bruno without informing him of the fact—a quite likely contingency, and was her departure for Paris a result of that triumph? If the information that Dupeyron had brought him that morning could be relied upon, it was quite possible that she intended to sell the secret of the invention to the new mystery organisation which, as he already knew, was causing Crosber and Kuhnreich considerable perturbation.

He pulled a telegraph form towards him, and, after further thought, wrote in code :

“Suspect Brendt of treachery new espionage organisation. Advise extreme caution.”

It was shortly after he had ordered this to be despatched that a visitor was announced.

To his astonishment the name on the card was : “Sir Harker Bellamy, K.C.M.G., D.S.O.”

CHAPTER XX

BELLAMY TALKS

VOLTAG hesitated. How had Bellamy learned of this address and his real identity?

He decided he must bluff it out. The chief of Q.X must have some very important reason for this audacious visit, and it would be interesting to discover what was at the back of his thoughts.

"Show Sir Harker Bellamy in," he ordered.

Bellamy, when he entered the room, greeted his host with a surprising *bonhomie*. Voltag knew this to be so foreign to the man's real nature that he became instantly suspicious.

He assumed the character of the Dutch cigar merchant he was supposed to be.

"I do not think I have the pleasure of your acquaintance, Sir Harker—but sit down," pointing to a chair.

"You can cut all that out, my dear Voltag—I'm here on business," was the swift retort.

He pretended to be surprised.

"'Voltag'? What is that name?"

Bellamy became characteristically grim.

"It's the name of the chief resident Ronstadt spy in London," he replied—"not that he's going to be resident here much longer. Despite any further denials you may make, my friend, let me say that I am certain of your identity. By entering this country through a forged passport—that little matter has been checked up—you have rendered yourself liable to a charge under the Aliens Act—you know

that, I presume?—which will mean that you can be certain of putting in at least a couple of months' vacation in a thoroughly reliable gaol before being slung out of the country on a deportation order."

"I understand nothing of what you say," protested the listener.

"The Mole" grinned. He knew very well what the other must be thinking: Voltag understood of course, that if he was deported that would probably be the finish of him, so far as employment in the Ronstadt Secret Service was concerned. Crosber had no use for failures.

The other continued to protest.

"I shall go to my Embassy. The officials there will remove your ridiculous suspicions concerning me."

"All right. I have a car outside. . . . Sit down, Voltag, and don't be an ass. I came here to have a straight talk with you. I've really got your best interests at heart—if you only knew it."

Voltag resumed his chair.

"I admit nothing, you understand," he said.

"What about 'Coke' Mahon?" was the question thrust at him.

"'Coke' Mahon—is it the name of a man?"

"You know damned well it's the name of a man," cried the visitor with heat.

But, looking at Voltag's face, Bellamy was convinced that, however much the other might have lied before, he was now telling the truth.

"'Coke' Mahon is the name of a gunman from Chicago who was sent over here by Kuhnreich—now don't tell me you haven't heard of Kuhnreich!—to kill off my best agent, Tiger Standish," he went on to explain. "It would appear as though Crosber and Company were beginning to lose faith in you,

Voltag : I should hate to think of your being scuppered. No doubt, if I mentioned the matter to my friend, Sir Harold Lellant, the Assistant Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police, he would allow some one from Scotland Yard to be detailed as a guard."

It was too much. Voltag leaned forward in his chair.

" You say Crosber sent a man over here without my knowledge ? "

Bellamy nodded.

" Now you're being sensible," he returned, and pulling out a leather case from his pocket, he extended it to the other. Have a cigar ? "

Voltag, his face crimson, rejected the gift.

" Tell me something more about this man you call Mahon," he said.

Bellamy lit his cigar.

" On one consideration," he said—" fair exchange."

" What do you want to know ? "

" Exactly where Fraulein Elsa Brendt may be found at present. I have searched London for her, but—"

" She is in Paris."

" Thank you. It was as I expected. And her job ? "

Voltag shrugged.

" She is determined to stop your friend, Tiger Standish, from doing any further mischief."

Bellamy blew smoke contentedly.

" Thank you again. She will find it a rather difficult enterprise, I am afraid, but I am nevertheless grateful to you for the information. And now that we appear to be getting on so well, let me ask you one further question before giving you some

information in return: was it you, the Brendt woman, or both who caused the 'disappearance,' shall I say, of five of my agents recently?"

"I had nothing to do with it"—and again Bellamy felt the other was telling him the truth "Brendt got their identities and names from your own office."

"Ah! yes . . . young Lancing. Well, now, Voltag, without wasting any further time, I propose to do you a good turn. It may be foolish, because you have caused me a considerable amount of trouble in the past, and possibly will in the future, but, as it happens, I should not like you to be 'removed' by the Brendt woman."

"Removed?"

"That is the polite way of putting it; of course, I could have used the blunter term of 'murdered.'"

Before the staring Voltag could reply, Bellamy had drawn his chair a little nearer.

"How much do you know about the Schakalbande?" he asked.

"The Schakalbande?" the other reflected—and, for the third time since that strange talk had started, Bellamy knew he was sincere. "That means in English 'The Jackal Band.' Why, I know nothing."

"Yet you must have heard of it?"

"I have heard of it—yes. But I know nothing about it."

"You should have done, for it was started by an old agent of Carl Crosber's. His name is Ritter—Adolf Ritter—and he was chucked out of the Ronstadt Secret Service after he had fallen down very badly in a case¹ . . . Well, I needn't go into that, because it was a messy business from our point of view as well as yours. But the point is that

¹ *The Traitor.*

Ritter has started this organisation, which, with a sense of humour I must say I did not think he possessed, he calls the Schakalbande, or, as you have translated it, the Jackal Band. By the way, in case you don't know, Elsa Brendt is a co-director with Ritter in the running of the organisation."

"Then it's true?" declared his listener.

Bellamy stared.

"I don't know exactly what's in your mind," he said, "but you can take it from me that my information is thoroughly reliable. Just as is the warning I have come here to give you—that if you don't go into hiding somewhere or other you will be 'removed.' Fraulein Brendt, besides being perfectly willing to serve two masters, is a very ambitious young woman—her idea is to supplant you as Chief of the Ronstadt Secret Service in this country—which, as you will be able to see, would be a most excellent arrangement from the point of view of her own organisation."

"I must go to Paris."

"You can't go to Paris," replied Bellamy.

"Why not?"

"There are two very excellent reasons. The first is that I do not want you meddling in my plans, and the second is that if you crossed the Channel you would be in considerably greater danger than you are here. Do you know the safest place on earth for a man whose life is threatened? Prison—and that's where you are going, my friend."

Before Voltag could recover from his state of stupor, the speaker had covered him with a revolver.

"At Brixton you will be well cared for—I have issued instructions to that end—and you will be given an opportunity to have a talk with the disappointed Mr. 'Coke' Mahon . . . and now I will call my men in."

Altogether, Sir Harker Bellamy decided a couple of hours later, as he sat in his own office, not a bad morning's work. Thanks to the code-books that he had found in the Kensington house, he would be able, he felt certain, to act as a very efficient substitute for the accommodating Emil Voltag whilst the latter was taking his enforced holiday. In fact, he would not be at all surprised if Carl Crosber sent across congratulations . . . he had some nicely-cooked dud stuff all ready for the wire.

As for that young woman, Elsa Brendt. . . . Well, he must really begin to think seriously about her.

Taking off the receiver he put through a Paris telephone call.

CHAPTER XXI

THE WHISTLING APACHE

TIGER was in the midst of his conversation with the contrite Rossi when he was forced to break off owing to being summoned to the telephone.

"Now, remember," he said to the restaurant-keeper, "not another word about my being here."

Tears started to roll down the fat cheeks.

"I could cut my heart out——"

"That's all right," he was reassured ; "there's no need for any major surgical operations. My name's Cameron, don't forget, and you've never heard of anybody called Tiger Standish."

The Italian continued to fill the air with his *perfervid* declarations.

Marvelling what it was in the Latin temperament that permitted a man to do such Grand Opera stuff

at almost a moment's notice, Tiger went to the telephone and listened intently. It was Bellamy at the other end.

What his chief told him was of such importance that he arrived at the Bohy-Lafayette Hotel in Paris rather too early to meet the omnibus bringing the passengers on the afternoon plane from Croydon which was carrying a letter addressed to him from Q.1. From the talk which he overheard he gathered that the *Heracles*, the particular pride of London Airways, had been delayed on account of heavy fog over the Channel. Consequently, the omnibus that conveyed the passengers from the aerodrome at Le Bourget to the hotel had not yet arrived.

Still attired as Alistair Cameron, Tiger, deciding that it might be unwise to hang about in the foyer of the hotel, turned to the right and made his way into the cocktail bar, where he ordered an innocuous grapefruit cocktail.

The justly famous shaker, "Spider," who, as Standish was aware, knew everybody as well as everybody's business, was exchanging remarks with all and sundry. Presently he came along to where Standish was standing.

"Not much kick in that, sir," he ventured.

"No," replied Tiger in his best Scots; "but I have a weak stomach and must be careful."

"Bad luck."

"Aye." Tiger was amused—and delighted—to discover that the other had not penetrated his disguise. In other and less adventurous days he and "Spider" had swopped yarns by the hour. Now, it was evident, the cocktail-shaker regarded him as a complete stranger. Well, so much to the good!

"Are you staying over to see the International football match, sir?" asked Spider.

"Eh? . . . Oh, yes, I may stay on."

"They tell me Tiger Standish, the English centre-forward, is already in Paris," pursued the barman.

"Is that so? I've always wanted to have a look at that mon—they say he's a very good player."

"Good player! He's probably the best centre-forward that's ever lived—and an amateur, too."

"Well, well, you don't say! . . ." Lifting his glass he finished the drink.

This simple operation took him some little time, for something had happened. From his position at the corner of the bar he had a good view of any one passing the glass doorway which led into the hotel foyer. It was whilst he was making the last comment to the barman that he caught a glimpse of a man he thought he had seen somewhere before. A moment's reflection, and he decided it must be Helmut Kramer. Now, Helmut Kramer was a person concerning whom he had given a little thought since arriving in Paris. A few years before, Kramer had been the resplendent manager of a very resplendent hotel—nothing less than the Hotel Poste at Pé, as a matter of fact. But after the Alan Dalrymple *débâcle* he had mysteriously disappeared. The fashionable cosmopolitan world, which had made the Poste its rendezvous in the Ronstadt capital, had seen him no more. He had disappeared into the blue. . . . And now here he was, in the cocktail bar of the Bohy-Lafayette! Curious—and strange. It seemed to Tiger that, in the circumstances, he would have to give rein to his abnormal curiosity and try to discover what Kramer was doing in such unexpected surroundings.

Hurriedly excusing himself to the cocktail-shaker, he made his way quickly into the hotel foyer. But, although he had not been more than a minute

behind the other, Kramer seemed to have suddenly vanished off the face of the earth—at least, there was no sign of him in any of the hotel public rooms.

The reason for Kramer's disappearance was simple: he had been called to the telephone.

"You know who this is?" inquired a voice at the other end. "Standish, disguised as a middle-aged Scotsman, has been followed to the Bohy-Lafayette—watch out for him. Ring Pepin if he shows up and carry out the arrangement we made. That's all. Get busy."

Standish was just about to pursue his investigations in the Square du Montholon outside the hotel when he caught sight of his man in the telephone-box situated in the corner near the left side of the entrance to the hotel and immediately behind the hall porter's lodge. Here was a bit of luck, for, although he could not get sufficiently near to the box to overhear what was being said, through the glass door he was able to see that whatever Kramer was getting off his mind was something important, judging by the vehemence with which he delivered his obvious message.

Taking up his stand well back in the hall, Tiger now waited for the other to leave the telephone-box. As the man passed, he was able to verify his former suspicion: this was Helmut Kramer all right—and a Helmut Kramer who was not merely excited but was in a further desperate hurry. The other, indeed, was so preoccupied as he left the hotel that he made no attempt to ascertain if he were being followed. He walked rapidly out of the entrance; Tiger, following discreetly behind, saw him cross the south end of the square and make his way by a narrow street into the post office in the Rue de Bleau.

Hot now on the chase, Tiger followed him in and watched Kramer approach the *Poste Restante* window and make inquiries. The girl behind the counter nodded, looked in the box at the back of her and then handed Kramer a small package. Without a glance to right or left the former hotel manager left the building and returned (with Tiger in close attendance) to the hotel foyer, from where, after looking round the crowd, he passed through to the small lounge beyond, where he called a *garçon* and ordered a drink.

By this time Standish was quite certain that the man was worthy of further scrutiny. Kramer was giving every evidence of being thoroughly distraught. But in this respect he was on a parallel with many other people standing and sitting about. The fact that the plane was now more than an hour overdue was having its effect on everybody. But the ex-hotel manager appeared to have an especial anxiety ; Tiger now watched him approach the clerk in the Imperial Airways office and make a number of close inquiries. His relief when, at last, one of the uniformed attendants of the Airways line was seen to pin a message on the notice-board, giving the information that the *Heracles* had safely arrived at Le Bourget, was very marked.

During the twenty-five minutes which elapsed between the pinning up of this notice and the arrival of the omnibus with the passengers from the aerodrome, Standish never allowed his eyes to leave the man he was watching. Kramer, he decided, had sadly deteriorated since he had last seen him, bowing so gracefully from the waist to his distinguished clients at the Hotel *Poste*. He looked as though he had gone through a disintegrating process. He was still well-dressed, but his manner was furtive and ill at ease.

By this time Tiger had forgotten his original mission—and when, amongst the passengers alighting from the omnibus, he noticed a youth named Archie Sidebotham, an insipid-looking cub whom he had often seen trotting round the West End, visiting the Sleeping Watchman and other questionable pubs in the vicinity of Curzon Street, he ignored everything else and decided that fate must have guided him to this spot. The additional fact that destiny had had an assistant in the guise of Sir Harker Bellamy was momentarily forgotten ; especially when Sidebotham, after a quick look round the crowded room, went straight across to Kramer and engaged that mysterious personage in eager conversation.

Sidebotham had been an associate of young Victor Lancing in the latter's last days. Was there any significance in this ? He thought there might be—more particularly now that he had evidently travelled all the way from Croydon in order to keep this appointment.

Keeping well in the background he watched the pair for another five minutes, and then, as Kramer and Sidebotham left the hotel, he followed quickly behind. The two were making for the Opera Metro station. Taking a ticket himself, he watched Kramer leave Sidebotham and enter a telephone-box, his companion standing guard outside.

The call took a couple of minutes or so and then Kramer rejoined Sidebotham and they descended together and boarded a train on Ligne No. 9, booking for Pont de Sèvres. Not knowing exactly where he was going—nor caring—Tiger was almost caught unawares when the train reached the station of Chardon Lagache. This, from his knowledge of Paris, he knew was several stations short of where

the pair had booked. With a celerity that took him off his guard, Kramer and Sidebotham got up from their seats and rushed off the train. Tiger was just able to scramble on to the platform as the train started off again ; as it was, he was engaged in a short but bitter altercation with one of the conductors. By the time he had settled with the fellow, he noticed that the pair he was stalking were walking rapidly away in the direction of the viaduct at the end of the Exelmans.

The district was very dark and the roads badly lit, but, now that he had struck the trail, he was determined to see the thing through. The association between the dead Lancing and this very unsatisfactory young man from Piccadilly set him on the alert.

The pair had gained a good start and he was still fifty yards or so behind them when, emerging so quickly from the surrounding darkness that he did not notice the man until he had stopped in front of him, came a shabbily-dressed fellow.

“ *Avez-vous des allumettes, monsieur ?* ” asked the man.

Tiger took quick stock of his questioner. If this wasn’t a modern descendant of the old-time Apache, he didn’t know a criminal when he saw one. He knew the tricks of these gentry ; it was a common practice of such types to hang about in a dark, badly-lit street until some one, looking like prospective plunder, approached. Their manœuvre was to ask to be obliged with a match, and if one were fool enough to obey the request a match was struck and thrust straight into the donor’s eyes—to be followed by a nicely-aimed kick with the inside of the foot. Oh, yes, he knew all about *la savate*.

When the thing was done properly, it always meant a sure knock-out.

"*Je ne comprends pas,*" he said in his execrable French, and, without waiting for any further parrying, he let loose a swinging right.

It did not connect. The footpad had evidently been expecting such an answer, for he quickly side-stepped; putting two fingers into his mouth at the same time and emitting a shrill whistle.

Tiger knew what this portended: the other was calling up reinforcements.

Sure enough there came loping from out of the shadows a number of other men. Standish knew he had to act quickly. This was an elaborately arranged ambush—and, like the worst kind of fool, he had fallen plump into it!

With a growl of rage he rushed at the whistling Apache.

CHAPTER XXII

ODDS AGAINST

THE Apache both ducked and swerved, but he was not to get away as easily as that. Although missing with his right Tiger connected nicely with a straight left, the brute rushing directly into the blow, which caught him flush "on his over-prominent nose. The organ was immediately squashed like an over-ripe tomato.

Before Standish could do any further damage, however, the pack were on him. What saved him from utter and immediate disaster was his foresightedness in backing against the wall of the viaduct

as soon as he had laid out his first assailant. The four rats who now came snarling all carried what Tiger rightly guessed to be loaded sticks and rubber bludgeons. He himself was unarmed: his fists would have to suffice. . . . He realised—now it was too late—what an almighty fool he had been to venture into such a happy hunting-ground for crooks as this without a revolver.

He had no time for further conjecture. With two of the swine attacking on the right and the other two on the left, he had both hands and thoughts fully occupied.

An avalanche of numbing blows descended on his head, arms, body and legs—the enemy were not too scrupulous where they hit—and, although he had managed to put one of the clan down, this scrap was far too one-sided to go on very long. There could be only one end.

Impending disaster affects men in different ways: the thought that he might be quickly transformed into a corpse and tossed on some adjacent rubbish heap, or end, a nasty-looking mess, in the Seine, came as a stimulant instead of a depressant to Tiger: plunging into the attack again and disregarding the heavy blows that continued to fall like rain on his body, he “outed” two of his foes by neatly side-stepping and grabbing each by the collar and ramming their heads together with a force so terrific that both collapsed, leaning against each other for a moment like a couple of hopeless drunks, before falling to the ground.

But, quick as had been this startling manœuvre, it had yet taken time—and whilst Standish had been so occupied the other two Apaches had closed in and jointly applied the quietus to a bonny fighter and a very gallant gentleman. In fact, if it had not

been for some hitherto undiscerned male angel's materialising from nowhere, and laying about him with a rubber bludgeon which one of the vanquished had dropped, the prospect of England playing their chosen centre-forward in the forthcoming International match with France would have been distinctly woozy, if not actually non-existent.

As it was, when Tiger satisfied himself that he was in a position to weigh up the situation with more or less accuracy, he whistled in astonishment: the enemy had fled, taking their wounded with them—whilst standing regarding him with an intense expression whilst he performed the painful job of struggling to his feet, were a gendarme and—Archie Sidebotham.

The latter was the first to speak.

"Are you badly hurt?"

"I only feel I've been dragged through hell backwards," grunted Standish. "Was it you who did the Boy Scout stuff? Because, if so, my best salaams." He couldn't quite "get" the position at the moment, but no doubt, if he were sufficiently patient, light would come in time. "Do you know M. le gendarme?" he inquired.

"No, he's just arrived."

"I see. Well, I'd better try to do a little soothing—at the moment he looks as though he's swallowed a goldfish, bowl and all." Without further preamble, Tiger plunged into a flood of deliberately imperfect French.

At the end of the harangue:

"Let me get this quite clearly, monsieur," said the gendarme at something like 300 words to the minute. "You entered the Metro and got off at the wrong station. You found yourself in this deserted and desolated spot. Am I correct?"

Tiger bowed. It hurt like the devil, but *toujours la politesse*. Anyway, he bowed.

"That is quite correct, officer. Whilst I was looking round, trying to find some one of whom I might inquire the way, I was attacked by these desperate criminals. They were after what little money I carry, I suppose."

The gendarme looked at the speaker curiously.

"Monsieur put up a most gallant resistance—my congratulations!"

"*Merci*. But if it had not been for this gentleman"—motioning to Sidebotham—"I shouldn't have lived to tell the tale, I am afraid."

"Monsieur would like to return to his hotel, no doubt?"

"I should. Now that I'm all right"—feeling as though every rib in his body was broken whilst he spoke—"I don't want too much fuss made of this affair."

"Monsieur can rely upon me to be discreet."

A fifty-franc note changed hands.

Somewhat to his surprise, Archie Sidebotham consented to return with him to the fresh hotel where Benny Bannister, Standish knew, would be waiting.

In the taxi which the gendarme had summoned by a shrill whistle, Sidebotham had burst into a flood of words.

"I'm glad I was able to do what I could," he started, "because I don't mind telling you I'm the worst kind of rotter."

There followed a long and somewhat incoherent story of how the speaker had got into money difficulties and had been approached in a Jermyn Street

bar by the man whom he had crossed to Paris to meet—

"I didn't know at the time he was a Ronstadt Secret Service man," continued Sidebotham, "but it wasn't long before he got me exactly where he wanted me—I simply had to do what he told me or run the risk of being exposed to the police."

"You knew young Victor Lancing, I suppose?" was Tiger's next question.

"Yes-s. But," staring, "how—?"

"And a woman who called herself Elsa Brendt?" went on his interrogator.

"Yes. But who—?"

"Never mind who I am. Just answer my questions. It will be worth your while. What brought you to Paris to-day?"

"You'll think me no end of a swine—"

"Go on."

"Well, Kramer wanted me over here."

"Why?"

"Well, I had to try to be useful, I suppose—I don't quite know exactly what he meant to do with me in Paris—" He broke off. "But you must tell me who you are."

"And I must tell you once again that all you've got to do is to answer my questions."

"I say," staring, "are you a detective of any kind?"

"I'm a wholesale chemist, really. But, a word in your ear, young fellow—get out of Paris and keep out. And also get out of this muck. You know where you'll end if you don't, I suppose?"

"Yes."

By this time they had arrived at the hotel and Tiger made a quick entrance. He knew he must be looking a terrible sight and he did not want too

much notice taken by curious sightseers. He would be quite content with Benny Bannister's comments—he could rely upon these being sufficiently comprehensive.

But first he sat Archie Sidebotham in a chair and, whilst the faithful Bannister frowned and shook his head, mixed the younger man a drink.

"Get that inside your belt and stay here while I have a clean up. Then we'll talk business." He gestured to Benny, who was about to follow him into the bedroom, to remain on guard.

Twenty minutes later, feeling much the better for his ablutions and confident that, in spite of the heavy mishandling he had received, he had sustained no really serious injury, Tiger returned to the private sitting-room which he had ordered Bannister to engage.

"Here's a note, Benhy," he said to his servant. "Go down to the Bohy-Lafayette Hotel and ask for a letter which is addressed to Mr. Alistair Cameron." Still frowning portentously, Bannister departed.

"Now, Sidebotham," said Standish in a more serious tone than he had hitherto used, "I'm going to talk to you for what remains of your soul and if you've got any sense left you'll listen to what I'm going to say. You've got in a bad jam—but it's not too late to get you out. I think I can guess why you were brought to Paris—but that doesn't matter now. How are you off for money?"

"That's just the trouble," was the reply; "I've been gambling and lost everything I had left . . ."

"Usual story. Well, I can stake you to fifty quid, if that's any use. But only on one condition, remember—that you go back to London by the

night train, call at this address," handing over the piece of paper on which he had scribbled a few words, " and tell the man you will see the full story—all you've told me and a bit more. This man will want you to fill in the blanks—and, if you do, and come clean with the truth, I'll guarantee that you'll hear nothing more about it. Play the fool any longer, and I swear to God that I'll land you in clink for a number of years. Acting the traitor to one's country, especially at a time like this, is a serious offence, don't forget."

" I know."

" Well, what's your answer ? "

" I'll go—I'll go now."

" I'll see you off myself. There's a train leaving the Gare du Nord at midnight which will land you in Boulogne in nice time for the morning boat."

Well, that was that. Arrived back at the hotel, after seeing the young fool off to England, Tiger listened with what gravity he found possible to the tirade made by Benny Bannister.

" Why don't you chuck it, guv'nor ? " pleaded his servant. " Why, when you came in to-night I thought I'd be sick—me 'eart turned over as it was. What 'appened ? "

" I should simply hate to tell you, Benny ; and moreover, it wouldn't do you the least bit of good to know."

Still Bannister was not satisfied.

" What about your football ? " he queried.

" I shall be on hand Sunday, never fear."

" I don't know so much—looks to me as though you'll be lying on a slab in a morgue if you ain't careful."

" Benny, how pessimistic ! How very dreadfully

pessimistic! And now get me a drink, because I want to read this letter," taking up the epistle which Bannister had fetched from the Bohy-Lafayette Hotel an hour before.

The letter had been written by Bellamy, the Chief of Q.1 telephoning Tiger before starting to dictate it, notifying him of its arrival on the air liner that evening. Tiger, who during the past three years had had many eye-openers into the amazing efficiency of the Mole, now opened his eyes in astonishment. Apparently he was not the only one who knew about Adolf Ritter's activities in that very curious house at Billancourt. And he also was in possession of quite a lot of useful information concerning the inventor, Gaston Coret.

The letter proceeded :

"Coret is an ardent French patriot, who during the last war rendered very great service not only to his own country but to the Allies by reason of his inventions. I myself had the pleasure of meeting Coret on several occasions, and worked with him on various important missions. According to the information which I have been able to collect—it doesn't matter how—there does not seem to be much doubt but that Ritter has gained some kind of mastery over the old man, but unless Coret is off his rocker entirely I cannot conceive that he is allowing himself to be used for any traitorous purpose to the interests of France.

"Summing up the position, I think that Bayard Henderson, the well-known American journalist, who has just arrived in Paris, should pay a visit to M. Coret for the purpose of gaining an interview for his paper, the *New York Meteor*. A tip that might be useful to you is this: Coret should be

asked what his views were about this new marvel of television. I need not say anything more, I think.

"With all regards and best wishes.

B.

"PS.—Incidentally, the suggested meeting of Allied Secret Service chiefs is 'off,' so that you will not be bothered with that matter.

"P.PS—Watch out for Elsa Brendt. She is a co-director with Ritter in this business."

As the letter was in the latest code used by Q.1, it took Tiger quite a while to decipher its complete contents. But when he had mastered the type-written matter, he leaned back in his chair and pulled at his pipe reflectively. And, in spite of his bruises, he very quickly chuckled—if Bellamy had not given him these present instructions, he would have acted in just that same way: the Château Saint-Ange was certainly worth a second visit—and he intended to pay it at the earliest possible moment.

CHAPTER XXIII

PEPIN THE WOLF

KRAMER was excited.

"It worked perfectly," he told his two listeners. "Of course, I didn't wait until the end, but Pepin the Wolf—"

"What ridiculous names these creatures have!" broke in Elsa Brendt.

The former hotel manager looked surly.

"He is anything but a ridiculous person at this kind of work ; otherwise I should not have engaged him," he protested.

"Tell us exactly what happened," ordered Ritter abruptly.

"Sidebotham met me, as we had arranged, at the Bohy-Lafayette Hotel. The air liner was late and I had to hang about. I saw the man Standish there—yes, disguised as you had described 'over the telephone,' looking at the man. "When Sidebotham turned up I went ahead and telephoned Pepin.

"Then I set the trap—and the fool rushed into it. When Sidebotham and I rushed to the Metro, Standish followed. Recognising Sidebotham, he naturally thought something good was in prospect.

... No doubt he is thinking better of that now."

"Suppose we reserve the congratulations until afterwards ?" said Ritter curtly. "What happened to Standish ?—that's what I want to know."

"He followed us off the train at the station of Chardon Lagache. As you know, the district is very dark, with the roads badly lit—which suited our purpose admirably. I had arranged with Pepin that he should walk up to the Scotsman and ask him for a match."

"The usual trick," commented Elsa Brendt.

"Well, it worked in this case," returned Kramer, who was rapidly losing his temper. "There were five to one, so even such a redoubtable hero as Tiger Standish could not have escaped."

"Didn't you wait to see what happened ?"

"No. I thought it better I should get away, but"—noticing the accusing expressions on the faces of his listeners—"I can take you both to where Standish is now a prisoner."

"Where is that?" quickly inquired the woman.

"In a place that Pepin the Wolf reserves for his own special uses."

"Yes—but where?"

"It's just off the Rue de Rennes in Montparnasse."

Elsa Brendt would not be appeased.

"The man may be dead now—"

"Isn't that what you wanted?" flung back Kramer. "My God!" he went on. "I'm getting sick of this business. You two people don't seem to know your own minds."

"I know my own mind," said Ritter coldly. "What does it matter if Standish *has* been killed?" turning to Elsa Brendt. "The main thing is to get him out of the way. The trouble with you, my dear," with a sneer, "is that you are taking far too deep a personal interest in this Englishman—I will go so far as to say that possibly you have fallen in love with him."

"It's a ridiculous lie—and be careful, Ritter, or you will be sorry you opened your mouth so wide."

It was a distinct threat, and Ritter, swallowing his rage, decided that discretion—at least, for the time being—was much the better part: he did not want to fall out with this woman—not yet.

"I'm sorry," he said shortly. He rang a bell, and to the servant who appeared he gave the curt order:

"The car—quickly."

Five minutes later the three were speeding towards Paris at the rate of over sixty miles an hour.

The underworld of Paris has a fluid floor; one can slip through and be never seen again. Once beneath the surface, one finds creatures so in keeping with their surroundings of slime that it is scarcely believable they are human.

This set of cellars, opening one into the other, stank of many things—stale wine, human sweat, and the pale, nauseous reek of the dampness that lurks beneath the surface.

Pepin the Wolf, his face looking as though a truck had passed over it, was sitting crouched in a chair. He had gone to earth, like the human rat he was, after his failure. He was giving an account of his stewardship and he did not find it an easy task.

"It was the flicks who got him away," he growled, putting up a finger to touch, very gingerly, his maltreated nose.

Adolf Ritter rose.

"It is thought that he escaped," he said. He motioned to his two companions.

"I must get some air: if I stay here another minute I shall be sick."

Coming on the top of the other's abrupt manner, Pepin resented this criticism. What was more, the injury to his nose was causing him the most exquisite agony. This combination of provocations made him leap from his seat.

"When do I get my money?" he inquired—and every syllable was a separate menace.

Kramer, white to the lips, tried to pacify him.

"It shall be sent to you, Pepin."

A string of oaths, so foul that they shocked even the hardened ears of the visitors, was the reply.

"You will pay it me now, or your friend will not have the chance to breathe his much-wanted fresh air."

"Go to hell!" cried Ritter.

In the circumstances it was an injudicious remark to have made—especially as a woman was a member of the party—and Pepin the Wolf quickly gave evidence of it: pursing his thin lips, he emitted a low

but shrill whistle : before Ritter could reach the door, a number of men, whose faces bore the unmistakable imprint of their class, poured into the room.

In this moment it was Elsa Brendt who tried to take control of the situation. She knew what the consequences inevitably would be if Ritter were allowed to infuriate this Apache chieftain further.

" My friend was joking—whatever money was promised you shall be paid now."

It was the opening of her bag that did the damage—the sight of the woman, exquisitely dressed, radiantly beautiful, had been sufficient temptation in itself, but when the lure of money was added to the physical provocation, Pepin, who badly wanted solace for all the humiliation he had suffered that night, let go all restraint.

" *Ma petite*, I will have you as well as the money," he declared.

The reply was unexpected. The hand which emerged from the vanity-bag did not hold money—it gripped the handle of a revolver.

" You piece of filth—move an inch and I'll kill you ! " The thought of this walking physical horror touching her flesh broke through the rigid reserve she had up till now exercised.

A deafening clamour immediately arose—and, in the midst of this distracting tumult, the necessary task was done : moving silently, some of the Wolf's followers started their familiar trade—two of them seized the woman from behind and imprisoned her right arm. The revolver was forced out of her fingers by a deft twist of the wrist.

" Don't hurt her—I want her just as she is," roared Pepin, a number of broken teeth showing as he smiled his appreciation of the good work done.

Elsa Brendt looked round : like herself, both Ritter and the ex-hotel-keeper had been made prisoners.

Kramer, his voice shaking, entreated :

"Pepin, what do you mean by this ? I am a friend—not an enemy. Why are you doing this to us ?"

The Apache leader stepped up to him.

"Because they tried to make me—me, Pepin the Wolf !—out to be a fool," he retorted, and spat in the captive's face.

Ritter exploded.

"You fool !" he roared. "Do you think you can get away with this ? Do you know who I am ?"

The other laughed raucously.

"Of course I know who you are—the Chief of the Jackal Band. A word to the French counter-espionage branch, and you—but there will be no need for that now ; like a true patriot"—smiling horribly—"I will attend to you myself."

"What are you going to do ?" quavered the ex-hotel-keeper.

For the second time Pepin the Wolf grinned.

"There will be nothing whatever for you to worry about—after the next half-hour ; only the little one here will—"

The speaker suddenly stopped. For the door was opened and a man dressed in very different fashion from the members of the Apache gang entered

The newcomer took one swift look round and then addressed Pepin.

"What is going on here ?" he asked.

That the newcomer carried with him a certain authority was evident by the respect in the chieftain's voice as he replied.

"They are enemies of France—and I am going to deal with them," he said.

"Enemies of France! What poisonous rubbish you do talk, *mon vieux*, sometimes! On the contrary, these three people are very good friends of mine, and I must ask you to release them immediately."

It was a tense moment. The only sound that could be heard was the choking sobs of Kramer as he realised that he might yet be saved from a terrible death. It had been suicidal of Ritter to provoke the Apache leader in the way he had done.

Pepin looked at the members of his gang and the latter growled. Although it was obvious to Kramer that the newcomer exercised some kind of influence over this group of criminals, yet the desire-inflamed Pepin did not appear likely to obey the stranger's request. And, what was more, he evidently had the enthusiastic support of his followers.

"What you ask——" he started, and was apparently about to utter the other's name when he was silenced by an imperative gesture.

"No names, please," ordered the other, and this injunction was directed as much to the persons he had announced his intention of rescuing as to the denizens of the underworld he appeared to command.

"All right," growled the Apache chieftain; "no names. But what you ask is impossible."

"Nothing is impossible, Pepin, where I am concerned—you should know that. And rest assured, my friend, that it will be made up to you—but these people cannot be detained here any longer. Have I not told you they are friends of mine? They must be released—that is my final word."

For several seconds the two stared hard at each other. Then the Wolf's eyes dropped.

"Very well," he conceded. "But you understand, if it had been any one else——!"

"I am myself," was the mystery man's answer.

Outside, Ritter found his car (which he had correctly surmised had been stolen) restored to his use.

The mysterious benefactor of the party, having heard the story of that night's adventure, said a few pregnant words.

"Have a care, *mon ami*—it was foolish of you to have provoked the man—don't you understand that he is a very real force in this part of Paris? But no matter; although Standish has slipped through our fingers this time, we shall soon get him again. I promise you that."

Vain and egotistical as were the words, they had a certain assurance. But if the speaker could have been able to read the immediate future, he would have cut his tongue out rather than have uttered them in that loud tone.

For, as it happened, a figure shuffling by heard distinctly every word.

The result was forthcoming in an interview at the *IIIème Bureau* of the French Secret Service at ten o'clock the following morning. Etienne de Chauny, the Chief of this particular branch of French Intelligence, was addressing a subordinate.

"Lecoitre," he thundered, "you are a traitor!"

The agent looked as though he had been hit by a thunderbolt; then, marshalling all his remaining courage, he demanded an explanation.

"It shall soon be given you. Do you deny that you were in the company of a notorious Apache leader called Pepin the Wolf, in a cellar just off the Rue de Rennes in Montparnasse last night?"

"I do," declared the stricken man.

"It is a lie."

"You must prove it's a lie."

What a foul piece of misfortune this was—how could he have been shadowed? He had taken every possible precaution.

De Chauny continued to speak in a voice that lashed the other like a whip.

"I charge you with being directly concerned with the murder of La Coste," and then, after waiting for a reply but receiving none: "For some months now, Lecoitre, you have been under suspicion," he said. "I have said nothing because I wanted complete proof. But I know now where to locate the leakage.—I know the means by which the plans of the new fortifications on the Ronstadt border were obtained by certain people in Pé."

"I demand proof, *mon commandant*."

"You shall have it." De Chauny pressed a bell. "Tell the gentleman who is waiting that I am ready to see him now," he said to his secretary.

The next moment a man, whom Lecoitre instantly recognised, stepped briskly into the room.

One look at this man's face, and the traitor covered his eyes with his hands. All the courage and bragadocio he had shown the night before vanished like mist before the sun.

De Chauny's closing words were significant.

"At your lodgings, Lecoitre, you will find a revolver. It is loaded. Use it within two hours—and nothing more will be heard of your disgrace. Now go."

The man staggered from the room.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE DEAF-MUTE

FROM his middle age onwards, Gaston Coret had had two ruling passions. One was his work as a research student into the marvels of electricity, and the other was a gentler hobby—the cultivation of orchids. It was because he could potter about to his heart's content in the great greenhouse which was such a prominent feature of the extensive grounds of the Château Saint-Ange, that he had been attracted to the mansion at Billancourt in the first place ; and throughout the years that had followed his taking up residence there, he had found as much happiness—he often declared—as one human being could hope to achieve whilst assiduously watching the growth of his various blooms. Now and again famous horticulturists would arrive at the Château and spend an hour or so inspecting his latest exhibits ; but he had been denied the comfort of these visits since M. Reclus, his new secretary, had taken control of affairs. That was one quality in Reclus which he did not like—his dominating masterfulness—but he was too old himself now to put up any sort of fight. When a man reached his age, and couldn't hear and could scarcely see . . .

If he had been even ten years younger, he would have fought Reclus on certain points, no doubt ; but, as it was, what did it matter ? He was allowed to potter about in peace ; his meals were prepared promptly and served correctly ; his other small wants attended to without any hitch—he was too old to bother about the rest. No doubt Reclus was

feathering his own nest very well, but even that did not matter—there was no one in the world to whom he wished to leave his money (if there had been a relative of some kind it would have been different), and Reclus, after all his hard work—and he had worked hard and was still working hard, although what the devil he did up in the house for so many hours a day he could not decide. "Protecting the inventions," the man had always replied when he had questioned him. Well, there were things in the house that were valuable without a doubt; after all, hadn't he the reputation of being the greatest inventive genius after Edison and Marconi?

Oh, he was too old to bother about anything except his orchids. He had got past—long past—serious work, and his blooms were now the only things that really interested him.

Of course, Christophe did not like Reclus—he had never liked him. The deaf-mute gardener, whose hunched back and startlingly ugly face had been known to frighten strangers, and especially children, had "talked" to him many times by means of the deaf-and-dumb alphabet, saying that the secretary was scheming against him, that he was up to no good, that the visitors who came in such ever-increasing numbers to the Château were not Reclus' friends, but were conspirators. Conspirators! How absurd! Who would want to conspire against him? He had told Christophe so, but the deaf-mute had not been convinced. "Conspirators against the country—against France," he had replied, his face and body contorted hideously through excitement.

Padding about in his worn carpet slippers, Coret, grown senile and admitting the fact, tried, as he went from bloom to bloom, bestowing upon each the

affection he would have given to his grandchildren had he possessed any, to reason out exactly what maggot Christophe could have got into his mind. Conspirators against France ! Why, that was a serious accusation. A very serious accusation. He had always been a patriot—his most important inventions had without exception been placed in the first instance at the service of the nation.

He would have to see Reclus. His secretary would laugh, of course—how absurd the accusation sounded now he came to think about it !—but, still, a thing like this had to be sifted ; he couldn't allow it to be said that his house was being put to any improper use.

But first, perhaps, he had better see Christophe again.

But where was the rascal ? He couldn't see him anywhere ; come to that, he hadn't seen him all the morning.

Going to the door of the hothouse, he looked to right and left, muttering to himself.

“ Christophe ! Christophe ! Where are you ? ”

A voice at his elbow answered :

“ Why do you want Christophe, Monsieur Coret ? ”

It was Reclus, but how the fellow had got there he couldn't guess. That was something else he didn't quite like about Reclus : he was apt to materialise himself out of nowhere in the most uncanny fashion.

It had been a trying morning, and the irritation he felt was reflected in his voice.

“ What has that got to do with you, M. Reclus ? I wish to give Christophe some orders. Where is he ? ”

The reply was unexpected.

“ Christophe is giving me very grave trouble.

I believe he has turned from a half-wit into a dangerous lunatic."

"A lunatic! He is nothing of the sort! Where is he? I want to see him." There was something in Reclus' face which he did not like, which was disquieting.

A sound came from behind the secretary. A shuffling figure that might have been the late Lon Chaney playing the rôle of his career, Quasimodo in "The Hunchback of Notre Dame," came into view.

As Christophe saw his master, he pitched forward and fell at his feet.

CHAPTER XXV

CORET IS AFRAID

M. CORET looked first at the grovelling Christophe, who was apparently demanding protection from his employer—and then at Reclus.

The secretary was quick with an explanation.

"He has come to you in the hope that you will shield him, M. Coret," he said.

"Shield him from what?"

"From the punishment he so richly deserves." Before the aged man could ask for a further explanation, Reclus had hastened on. "I have had my suspicions of this fellow for some time," he said, "and this morning I caught him red-handed. He is a thief, M. Coret."

"A thief? Impossible! I don't believe it."

"I was afraid you wouldn't—that was the reason I have not mentioned the matter before. But various moneys have been missing from the house,

and so I set a trap. Twenty minutes ago I caught Christophe in the very act of stealing some specially-marked fifty-franc notes from a drawer in my desk. Would you believe that he had the impertinence to deny everything—I should say that, seeing me coming through the door, he stuffed the notes into his pocket—but Marthe and Jules will both bear me out in what I have said. We found the banknotes on him—and the police will not require the evidence of more than three witnesses, I suppose?"

A note of almost insolence had crept into the secretary's voice as he concluded his indictment. The inventor, looking again at the shivering Christophe, shook his head in further bewilderment.

"I don't understand it at all," he said. "I cannot believe—"

"Not even when you have three witnesses, M. Coret?"

There was still further shaking of the head.

Coret stooped and touched the deaf-mute on the shoulder. In the deaf-and-dumb alphabet he told the gardener to stand up.

Christophe staggered to his feet. His dog-like eyes searched his master's face, whilst his gnarled fingers worked convulsively.

"Don't tolerate his lies, M. Coret," warned the secretary—but was told peremptorily not to interrupt.

The "words" which Coret was able to read gave a very different version to the affair. The deaf-mute said that a plot had been made against him by Reclus and the two servants, Marthe and Jules. These three—especially Reclus—wanted to get rid of him. He did not know why—but guessed that it was because he was suspicious of what was going on in the house.

"Master," the gardener flashed to his employer through his quickly-working signs, "they are out to get rid of me. I am afraid—afraid for your sake, especially, because, when I have gone, who will there be to protect you? It is what I have already said—there is something desperately wrong—evil—going on in the house, and M. Reclus is at the back of it. Do believe me. I swear I am telling you the truth!"

Coret did believe him. During the ten years that Christophe had been in his employ he had never once had occasion to doubt him. He knew the gardener to be faithful and loyal—ever since he had taken pity on him and provided him with work, food and shelter, Christophe had shown him the utmost devotion. It was impossible to believe that the man could have turned himself into a thief—far more likely, indeed, that Reclus, jealous for some reason—or was it fear that had prompted this cowardly action?—of the gardener's loyalty—had determined upon a scheme of such malignance.

He had been a fool, he was afraid; he had put too much faith in this man, Reclus. The knowledge brought him a sense of dread. He must get help. Yet it would not do for him to show his feelings too openly; he must meet craft with guile.

"All right, Reclus," he said to the secretary. "Thank you for telling me about this. But I can't be worried now—I want Christophe to help me in the greenhouse."

Reclus stood his ground.

"Do you mean to tell me, M. Coret, that you are still willing to keep this rascal in your employment?"

"He tells me," dissembled the inventor, "that he is very sorry and that it will not occur again. After all, Reclus, I could never find another gardener

who understood my wishes so well. I think, really, I must give him a second chance."

For a few seconds it seemed that the secretary would break into fiercer protests. Then, conquering his feelings with an obvious effort he bowed to his employer and said :

" I am only anxious to serve you, M. Coret. Your wishes are my wishes, of course."

With that, he turned on his heel and walked back towards the house.

As soon as the secretary was out of sight, the inventor drew Christophe into the huge greenhouse and shut the door.

" Now tell me the truth, Christophe," he said in the man's own " language."

The pathetic figure put a hand over his heart. If another man had done it, it would have been a courtly gesture ; as it was, the action carried a dignity which transcended Christophe's physical handicaps.

" I swear to you, master, I have already told you the truth. M. Reclus is a scoundrel—you have given him too much confidence and power. He is scheming to get rid of me because he knows that I will do all I can to protect you."

" What—do you think I am in danger of my life, Christophe ? "

" I do not know exactly what to think, master. I only know that strange things are going on in the house. There is a woman there now——"

" A friend of M. Reclus—that is all."

" Perhaps, master—perhaps not. I have already told you—yes, many times—that I think Reclus is up to some mischief, not merely against you but against France ! That is my belief . . . we shall see ! "

"But, assuming that what you tell me is true, how can I get help? I must get help."

At that moment the tall figure of a complete stranger was seen outside.

Back at the house Ritter narrated what had happened to Elsa Brendt, whose car, five minutes before, had driven up the drive at a reckless pace.

"We shall have to get rid of that damned Christophe," the supposed secretary growled. "The worst of it is that the old fool thinks the world of him—even when I swore that I'd caught the fellow in the very act of stealing some banknotes belonging to him, he wouldn't believe a word of it. He pretended to do, but that was because he has suddenly become obstinate."

The woman's quick-wittedness supplied an interpretation.

"Which means that he is becoming suspicious."

"Exactly. And through this cursed gardener. He must be got rid of."

Elsa Brendt cupped her chin in her right hand.

"Yes—and immediately. It ought to be easy...." She leaned forward to speak in a lower tone.

At the end:

"I will see to it," said Ritter.

"And now, here is something else—my real reason for coming down here; I had forgotten it, listening to what you have been telling me," went on the woman. "Lecoître has been arrested."

Lecoître arrested! Here was startling news and disconcerting information at the same time.

"They'll try to third-degree him." Ritter's face was suddenly ashen.

The woman took a more philosophic view of the situation.

"I don't think they will get anything out of him—you know what de Chauny is like: he will allow nothing to affect his decision. A traitor is a traitor to de Chauny, and Lecoître could not hope to get any consideration even if he did open his mouth."

"Nevertheless, I don't like the sound of it, Elsa," returned Ritter.

"Forget it! Let's concentrate on this gardener fellow. When can it be done?"

"To-night," replied Ritter.

Some hundreds of yards away Coret stared at the stranger, who approached with a courteous raising of his hat.

"You must pardon me, monsieur," started the intruder, speaking with an American accent, "but my name is Bayard Henderson, and I am a reporter on the Paris edition of the *New York Meteor*. I have been sent out to Billancourt to obtain, if possible, an interview with the world's greatest inventor."

Pleasant words! So pleasant that the old man warmed to the speaker immediately. He did not stop to inquire by what unorthodox methods the journalist had obtained admission to the grounds of the Château Saint-Ange. Moreover, this unexpected visit, coming so quickly upon his decision to obtain help from the outside world, seemed a direct gift of Providence.

"I shall be pleased to answer any questions you may care to put to me, Monsieur Henderson," he replied. "Come on in," holding open the door of the greenhouse.

Screened from outside view, the supposed reporter looked inquisitorially at Christophe.

"Who's this—your gardener?" he inquired.

"Yes. He has been with me for ten years now, and I could not possibly replace him. Now tell me exactly what you want to know."

Tiger Standish's views on the new wonder of television were about as vague as that of the ordinary person, but he proved his capacity to enact his new rôle by allowing Coret to do most of the talking.

"Thank you, Monsieur Coret; that will do admirably," he said at the end of ten minutes. "I am quite sure that the readers of the *Meteor* will be delighted with your statements. And now may I have the pleasure of walking through your grounds—they strike me as being very interesting."

Tiger watched the aged inventor glance at the gardener, who he had already decided must be a deaf-mute. The latter commenced to "talk" with his hands.

"Monsieur Henderson," said M. Coret, with the manner of a man who has made up his mind, "I wish to give you a confidence."

Standish stiffened. He had come to the Château Saint-Ange with the determination to unmask as many of its secrets as was possible. Was luck going to play into his hands in this way? Did Coret already know that his "secretary" was entirely bogus and generally a wrong 'un of the highest degree?

"I am honoured, monsieur," he replied. "Just tell me in what way I can repay you for your kindness in giving me this interview—and, well, say, I'll surely be tickled to death."

The inventor looked once more at the deaf-mute. The latter again got busy with his fingers. It looked as though Coret was anxious to have his own opinion regarding the visitor confirmed.

"I am perhaps placing my future safety in your hands, Monsieur Henderson," stated the inventor after a short pause. "I dare say that may sound a very strange statement to you, but the truth is that quite recently I have suddenly awakened to the fact that the lives of both this faithful servant (who you can see is a deaf-mute) and myself are threatened. Nominally I am supposed to be the master of this château. It is true I am still the owner of the place—but I have been foolish enough to permit the power of controlling it to pass from my hands."

"And how may I help you, Monsieur Coret?"

"By going to the *Sûreté* when you return to Paris, monsieur, relate to them this conversation we have had and say that I should be obliged if they would send an inspector and some men out to see me immediately."

Tiger nodded.

"I will do that with pleasure, of course, M. Coret, but—perhaps naturally—the police will, I think, be inclined to ask me for further details. Of what and of whom are you afraid?"

Coret looked round nervously; as though interpreting his thoughts, Christophe, the deaf-mute, took up a position by the door of the hothouse.

"I have only recently discovered that the man in whom I have put so much faith may possibly be a great villain," was the inventor's reply.

"May I ask to whom you refer, M. Coret?"

The quivering voice sank to a whisper.

"To my secretary, M. Reclus."

Tiger felt something brush past him: it was the deaf-mute. The man was pointing excitedly over his shoulder and looking earnestly into his master's face as he did so.

Coret supplied the answer to the puzzle.

"Here is the man himself," he said. "Please do not betray my confidence, monsieur."

There could be no doubt about it. This poor old man was badly frightened. The sight made Tiger swing round violently as the lowering face of the man he knew as Adolf Ritter showed itself on the other side of the hothouse door.

Standish flung the door open and carried the attack into the enemy's camp by starting a verbal fusillade.

"Now, say, isn't this lucky? Oh, by the way," taking a card from one of his waistcoat pockets, "I suppose it's up to me to introduce myself? Yes, sir! Well, here's my card, Mister Secretary," thrusting the piece of pasteboard into the hand of the furious-looking addition to the small group. "I came out here to interview this wonderful old gentleman," crossing to M. Coret and slapping him on the back (taking the opportunity to whisper as he bent forward, "Leave this to me!"), "because the whole world—at least, the readers of the Paris edition of the *Noo York Meteor*—wanted to know how he was getting on. Although M. Coret has been out of the public eye for some time now, he hasn't been forgotten; there are still a great number of people who are very anxious to know how he is getting on. But of course, you, as his secretary, general manager, housekeeper and what-not, are safeguarding his interests in every way? I'm asking on behalf of the readers of the Paris edition of the *Noo York Meteor*, Mister Secretary."

At last the other found his voice.

"Who is this fool, and how did he get here?" he exploded, walking up to Coret, and in his excitement taking hold of the old man's shoulder.

The next minute he had reeled back. Like a wild

cat, Christophe had sprung at him, groping for his throat. Ritter, livid, and shaking like a man demented through rage, threw the deaf-mute off, and pulled out a revolver.

Instantly his hand was jerked up and the gun fell to the floor.

"Say," drawled the voice of the supposed American newspaperman, "it's no concern of mine, of course, but I can't stand by and see a poor deformed creature shot down like an animal. If you'll forgive me for saying so, Mister Secretary, that action of yours in pulling that gun was altogether uncalled for. Like a good newspaperman, I'm always out for a good story, but I can't stand by and see plain murder done—no, sir!"

Ritter looked at the speaker. Then, choking back his rage, he stooped to pick up the revolver.

But the other was before him.

"Excuse me, but I think in the circumstances I'd better see that this pop-gun can't do any damage," said the representative of the *New York Meteor*, "breaking" the revolver and extracting the shells. "There you are, Mister Secretary," he continued, passing the weapon over to the livid Ritter; "now everybody will be happy."

For all the control he had summoned, the man he addressed gnashed his teeth as he demanded:

"How dare you speak to me like that? And how did you get here?"

A slow smile broke over the newspaperman's face.

"Well, now, Mister Secretary, I do believe you're still cross! But, if you must know, reporters are an unorthodox lot—by that I mean that if they can't hope to get in by the front door, why, then, they'll get in by the back. I heard in Paris that by somebody or other's orders—could it have been yours,

Mister Secretary?—M. Coret was no longer receiving visitors. That was why I didn't trouble to apply at the front door—I knew darned well I shouldn't be admitted. Any more questions, because if not I'd like to be getting along, my editor will be wondering what's become of me."

The reply was unexpected.

"I accept your explanation, Monsieur Henderson, and I am sorry I was so brusque just now. But my temper has been severely tried lately."

"Well, now," came the drawled comment, "that's just too bad. But all the same, I think that a little self-control is always a good thing to have by you . . . if you only knew, Mister Secretary—"

"Stop calling me 'Mister Secretary'!" cried the other. "My name is Monsieur Reclus!"

"Shucks!" came back Tiger with the best bit of Americanese he had yet got over. "There I go again! But what can I call you if I don't call you 'Mister Secretary'? You see, I'm very poor at these high-sounding French names. However, all's well that ends well, as we say in the States, so I hope we shall part the best of friends, Mister—goldarn it, there I go again! Well, good-bye, M. Coret, and thank you once more for your kindness." Now that his back was turned, he was able to give the aged inventor a reassuring look. "And good-bye to you, too," he said, winking at Christophe. "I know you can't hear a word I say, but good-bye all the same. Now I'm ready," he added, in a more serious tone, addressing Ritter. "I suppose you're waiting to see me off the premises?"

"I am waiting to do my duty by you as a guest of my employer," came the correction.

"Well, that's simply swell of you—and," waving his hand to the two he was leaving behind, "I'm

very grateful. It shows me that you've no bad feelings against a guy who perhaps, when all is said and done, talks too much." He was thinking hard as he fell into step by the other's side.

Had Ritter recognised him, and if so, was he preparing some sort of snare? For his own part he felt he did not want to leave until he had secured some really worth-while information apart altogether from the news that Coret had passed on. Poor old josser! To have let himself in for the sort of existence he was living now!—why, the old boy was really nothing better than a prisoner!

He looked at Ritter, but the man's face was expressionless. It was impossible to guess the other's thoughts.

So the walk was continued in silence until the château was reached.

" You'll come in and have a drink before you go, Mr. Henderson ? " suggested his companion.

Tiger hesitated. He knew the risk. But he was armed, and in the circumstances he felt that the challenge—if it was a challenge—could not be ignored. He had come out from Paris that day determined to explore as far as was possible this house of mystery. Besides, he could not think, especially after what had happened in the hothouse, that Ritter would be such a crass fool as to attempt any funny business. So far as he knew, the supposed secretary of M. Coret had taken him at his face value—in other words, there was every indication that the head of the Schakalbande accepted him for what he had presented himself to be—namely, the representative of an extremely powerful American newspaper.

" Thanks," he replied, " but it must be a quick one because I have to get back to Paris."

"I understand. And before we go any further, Mr. Henderson, I should like to apologise for what happened just now. As I tried to explain, my temper has been sorely tried recently—you see," he went on, in an apparent burst of confidence, "my job is not too easy here. I had found that wretched deaf-mute stealing some money this morning, but when I complained to M. Coret, the old man—you can see for yourself that he is not quite all there in the upper story—pooh-poohed the suggestion, and—well, there it is."

"Very awkward for you." Tiger could be as courteous as the next man when the occasion warranted it. He loathed this fellow almost as much as he had ever disliked any human being, but the present circumstances compelled him to put on the soft pedal.

Once inside the house his companion led the way to that same large room, furnished as an office, which he had visited before when calling himself Alistair Cameron.

"This is where I do my work," announced the other; "and I'm kept pretty busy, let me tell you. There is a great deal of detail to see to in connection with Coret's patents all over the world. And now, if you will excuse me for a moment, I will ring for some drinks—what will you have?"

"Got any beer?"

"Certainly. As a matter of fact, although it's not a very patriotic action, perhaps, I keep a special kind of lager always on tap. I can recommend it."

"Good! I hate the French beers—they're much too light for my taste."

"Exactly. Well," crossing the room and pressing a bell in the wall, "I think you will like this

Bremen brew. It ought to send you on your way rejoicing."

Whilst the man's back was turned, Tiger took a quick look round. The room appeared innocuous enough, but he had no doubt it contained a good many devilish devices. Trapdoors, perhaps. He could not think that, with Ritter carrying on the game he was, he did not possess ample means of defence.

His host faced about.

"Sit down, won't you?" he said courteously, pointing to a large red-leathered chair which simply invited a weary man to rest.

Tiger was not weary; on the contrary, he was both mentally and physically alert; but there did not seem to be any reason for refusal. Still . . .

"I'm all right," he returned. "As a matter of fact, I've been missing my golf lately . . . always try to get a round at least three times a week. But perhaps you know what the courses round Paris are—crowded all day long."

"I don't play golf myself," replied the other.

"No time, perhaps?"

"No, no time."

"Pity."

Whilst this persiflage was going on, Tiger told himself he must not relax for a single moment. That comfortable-looking chair, for instance—no doubt it was a man-trap of some kind. He had encountered similar things before. No, he certainly was not going to sit down in that room. And the beer? Would that be drugged?

Whilst he was thus conjecturing, he heard a slight click, and decided that this must have come from somewhere in the wall of the room opposite him. Nor was he mistaken; his keen eyes were able to

notice a panel in the woodwork slowly opening. He was being watched by a second person. . . .

Elsa Brendt !

There could be no doubt about it ; although he was able to catch only a fleeting glimpse of the woman's face before the panel closed again, he would have bet a million to one that the inquisitive-minded third party was none other than the famous woman spy of Ronstadt.

" Do sit down, Henderson," said Ritter again. The man was seated at the large desk which evidently formed his work-table.

The visitor suddenly looked at his wrist-watch.

" Holy smoke, I didn't realise it was so late—I must be off. The big shot—the proprietor of the paper, I mean—is due in town this afternoon and the first person he'll want to see is yours truly."

" But your drink ? " expostulated the man, who was watching him closely.

" I'm afraid I shall have to leave that . . . good-bye ! " shaking his left hand with his right. " And thanks for all your kindness."

The next moment he was at the door. He expected the handle to be electrically charged, but nothing happened to his hand. He passed through and found himself in the hall of the château.

Would he be pursued ? Or had his bluff succeeded ? These were the questions he asked himself as he walked rapidly down the drive after being stared at by a servant at the front door.

He hated himself for running away like this, but seeing the staring eyes of that woman at the spyhole (it *must* have been Elsa Brendt) had made him change his plans. He could not afford to risk such a gigantic gamble then. One word from the woman (that was, if she had recognised him), and

Ritter would never let him leave the place alive. Of course, he could have defended himself—there were six bullets in the gun he carried, but apart from the room's being probably full of the most devilish contraptions, there was the additional danger that the woman's suspicions had been aroused.

No, the real visit of inspection must be deferred.

But he was coming back; yes, he was coming back—and that very night!

CHAPTER XXVI

THE COURIER

THE woman was furious.

"Why did you let him go?" she demanded.

Ritter stood his ground.

"That man was an important American journalist—" he started, but was sharply interrupted.

"You fool! To be taken in by that stuff! That important American journalist," mimicking the way Ritter had said the words, "was Tiger Standish—and you allowed him to get away with his bluff!"

"You're damned clever, aren't you?" sneered the man. "If you were so positive he was that swine Standish, why didn't you give me the signal?"

"I hadn't a chance—I tried to catch your eye through that panel," pointing backwards to the wall, "but you kept your back turned all the time. And now what are you going to do? You seem to forget that Standish is both clever and determined."

Ritter laughed.

" If he is really as clever as you appear to think, then he has gone away feeling very pleased with himself—and as for being determined—well, his determination will probably bring him back again, in which case—" The lips parted in a snarl all the more vicious because it was silent.

" I don't like the way things are going," resumed Elsa Brendt. " The arrest of Lecoitre . . ." She stopped to frown, tapping the table by the side of which she was standing with a polished fingernail. " I wonder if it was Standish who gave Lecoitre away to de Chauny," she continued, as though uttering her thoughts aloud.

Ritter, for once, was in a provocative mood.

" Well, if he did," he commented, " it would be merely a case of crying ' quits '—it was Lecoitre who told us about your friend—"

" Fool ! He is not a friend, but an enemy ! "

" There is no occasion to be so furiously melodramatic, my dear. As I was saying, it was Lecoitre who told us that Standish"—he watched her out of mere slits of eyes—" was masquerading as that bloody fool of a Scotsman."

" He was such a ' bloody fool ' that he deceived you completely," sharply cried the woman.

At last the carefully controlled suavity of the listener cracked.

" I seem to recall an occasion—some ' little time back, it's true—when some one else we know was deceived by this marvellous Englishman ! Isn't that so ? "

She flung away from him.

" Do you think I've allowed myself to forget it for a single minute ? As you can't be relied upon, I'm going back to Paris and I'll attend to Standish myself."

"Be careful you don't get hurt," were the words he sent after her as she rushed from the room.

"I am afraid," said Coret. "Afraid."

The aged inventor had watched Bayard Henderson, the man in whom he had put his trust, disappear in the direction of the house accompanied by Reclus, without any feeling of real apprehension at first; but gradually a sense of impending danger had taken possession of him. He realised that Reclus had many ways of trapping the visitor if he were so inclined.

Christophe, looking up at his master's face, began to talk with his hands.

"Master, I go myself to get help—I can get a motor-car if you give me money and a letter to the police."

Coret brought his trembling hand down with relief on the mis-shapen shoulder.

"That's a good idea, Christophe—but can you get out without being seen?"

"Oh, yes, through the underground passage that leads to the cemetery."

"Ha! ha!" Hysterical laughter seized the frail form of the inventor. Reclus had not thought of that—no, he had not thought of that.

"But we must be quick, Christophe—here is money, and I will write you the note. Bring me some paper."

Within five minutes the whole thing had been done. The deaf-mute had disappeared through the trapdoor that led to the adjacent cemetery, and Coret was left alone.

How thankful he was now that he had never told Reclus about this secret passage! The story went a long way back—a couple of centuries, in fact. The

then owner of the Château Saint-Ange had been an eccentric millionaire, whose whole life was centred on the happiness of his only child—a motherless boy, whom he adored. When this boy, at the age of eighteen, died as the result of a mysterious complaint which none of the doctors of the time could diagnose, Lucien Barthelot had crossed the border-line into that dim realm in which sick and fantastic fancies held undisputed sway in his mind.

Unknown to any one else, he had an underground passage made from the château to the adjoining cemetery, where his beloved son had been laid to rest ; and it was his custom, night after night, to make this ghastly pilgrimage and sit until the sun rose by the side of his boy's grave. When he himself had died, and the property had passed into other hands, the passage had been blocked up from the house itself, and it was only by the merest chance that Coret had discovered the continuation of it leading from the hothouse in which he spent so many hours.

What a providential thing it was that he had kept the secret to himself ! There had been no reason, of course, why he should have told any one, including his secretary. As a matter of fact, up to this moment, he had never given the thing a thought.

His mind, rendered more active by recent events than it had been for many years, now concentrated on the journey of his faithful Christophe. In imagination he could see the deaf-mute shuffling along that damp underground corridor, stepping aside, perhaps, as the huge rats which he believed lived there came out from their hiding-places to see who this intruder might be ; watched him emerge into the neglected cemetery—over fifty years had passed since any one had been buried in

that particular piece of consecrated ground—and with his heart thumping rapidly, speculated on how long it would be before Christophe could obtain some kind of conveyance.

Would he ever get to Paris? Had Reclus set a trap for him as for that likeable young American journalist?

Had Gaston Coret been gifted with sight beyond mortal comprehension, he would have been able to witness a strange spectacle half an hour after Christophe had left the hothouse.

He would have been able to see the derelict motor which the deaf-mute had been able to commission stop at some cross-roads in order to allow a second and more powerfully built car to pass. As the latter drew close, the deaf-mute saw, with a feeling of utter bewilderment, some one staring at him fixedly through the glass window. It was so uncanny that he cried out before either he or the driver could put up any sort of resistance; the door of the decrepit car in which he was travelling had been wrenched open.

CHAPTER XXVII

BENNY IS BELLICOSE

BENNY knew, from the expression on his master's face, that Tiger was adamant, but still he kept on.

" You can sack me on the spot, guv'nor, but I'm going to speak my mind. Here's Thursday afternoon—the match is to be played on Sunday—and you haven't put in a bit of practice with the rest of the boys. They'll be choosing another centre-forward—that's what they'll be doing ! "

" Well, if they do, Benny—they must."

The answer made the ex-international centre-half clutch his head as though he were afraid it might leave his shoulders without this support.

" There're times, guv'nor," he managed to say at last in a strangled tone, " when you make me feel as though I shall go 'oppin' barmy—an' that's a fact. Take this present business, for instance—if I 'ad that Bellamy bloke 'ere now," he broke off, grinding his teeth, " I'd wring 'is blasted neck—"

" Benny ! "

" Yes, I would," asseverated Bannister. " It's 'im that's causing all this trouble, stoppin' you from playing your proper game."

Tiger smiled. It was his usual likeable grin and Bannister on any ordinary occasion would have surrendered to it. But not now ; he was feeling far too upset.

" Goin' about dressed like Gawd knows wot, tellin' all manner of lies, and pokin' your nose into things that—you'll 'ave to excuse me guv'nor, but I'm goin' to say it, especially now I've started—

don't concern you—you know I've always bin against it."

Standish was very gentle with him.

" You seem to forget one thing, Benny," he observed.

" Ho ! And wot's that, pray ? "

" That this nose-poking business is as much a job of work with me as playing centre-forward for the Swifts—in fact, more so."

Bannister made a noise like the snort of an angry horse.

" Do you get paid for it ? " he demanded.

" Of course not. Neither do I get paid for playing for the Swifts."

" That's different. You're a toff—I mean a gent ; nobody would think of offering you money to play football. Chuck it, guv'nor, before it's too late," he went on to plead.

" It's already too late, Benny."

" You will 'ave your joke, won't you ? I mean before you get your throat cut or your head blown off."

" Well, after to-night, perhaps. . . ."

" There you go again—it's always going to be the last time—and never is ! Wot do you think the mistress would say to me if she popped over 'ere from England and found that you'd turned yourself into a "blinkin' dead 'un ? "

" That would be awkward, I must admit, Benny."

" R ! But it wouldn't be awkward for you because you'd 'ave nothin' more to do with it—but can you tell me wot I should say to her ? "

In spite of the previous tendency to laugh (due to the contortions of Benny's face as he worked

himself into a state bordering on frenzy), Tiger now sobered. He knew the dangers of the job he had set himself that night ; he knew that it was quite possible he would never return from that house of mystery in Billancourt ; he knew, moreover, that Sonia . . . but he daren't allow himself to think of that.

"It's no good, Benny," he said seriously. "I've got to go through with this job ; I've promised Sir Harker——"

"Grrr ! "

"I've given my word," resumed Tiger, "and you'd be the last fellow in the world—you know you would!—to want to see me a quitter. After to-night, I promise——"

Bannister shrugged.

"There's only one thing left, then," he declared, "I shall 'ave to come with you ! "

"No go, Benny." Standish shook his head.

"Why ? "

"Because—well, for one thing, who would be left to look after Dick's supper if . . . No, Benny, I couldn't think of it."

For the first time since he had entered Tiger Standish's employ, the ex-professional footballer threatened to show flagrant insubordination.

"Then if you won't let me go, I'll be damned if——"

"There's some one at the door, Benny," interrupted his master ; and indeed, the row being made was sufficient to drown both their voices.

Bannister returned, holding an envelope. "Looks like a telegram," he announced.

"It *is* a telegram," confirmed Tiger—and, tearing it open, read :

"Auntie better. Coming Paris to-morrow morning. Undying love. Sonia."

At Standish's "H'm!" Bannister's former belligerence vanished.

"Nothin' wrong, I 'ope, guv'nor?"

"Mrs. Standish is coming to Paris to-morrow, Benny—"

"The mistress? God bless 'er! Now—"

"It will be necessary for you to stay here and look after her—see that she doesn't get into too much mischief buying frocks and that sort of thing."

Benny choked.

"Oh, guv'nor!" he cried despairingly.

"It's going to be all right, Benny, don't worry."

"Wot's the good of sayin' that, guv'nor, when I know—you can't kid *me*—that the chances are you—"

Tiger turned away. This man loved him with a devotion that was all the more sincere because it was largely inarticulate. He could not stand any more of it.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE GATHERING OF THE JACKALS

IT was Grogan who asked the question.

"Where's the fair Elsa?" he inquired.

Ritter endeavoured to negative the importance of the question by a wave of the hand.

"She had to go into Paris this afternoon, but she'll be back."

"In time for the meeting?" persisted the American, who had joined the Schakalbande through a desire for excitement, according to his own story, but who, driven underground by the police of the world because of his many crimes, had taken naturally to the work allotted to him.

"Of course," returned Ritter sharply. He was wondering what Elsa Brendt would say when she learned that this special meeting of the Jackals had been called without either her sanction or knowledge. He had purposely kept this conference a secret from her because of late he had not been able to rid his mind of the lurking suspicion that this co-director of his might be double-crossing him. She knew enough, God knew!—to have him put away by practically every nation in Europe; and if she was willing to double-cross Crosber, why shouldn't she double-cross him?

"That's all right, then—the meeting wouldn't be much good without Elsa. Besides, we want to hear the news from England."

"You shall hear, Grogan, in good time," promised the man who was acting as his host. But the hand

which raised the glass to his lips shook. The events of the past few days had been very trying. The arrest of Lecoitre and the visit that morning of the man who he now believed must have been Tiger Standish, had provided culminating points. His nerves were badly fretted. The prospect of telling the meeting the news about the French traitor added to the strain.

"Well, what are we waiting for?" A snapping voice broke into his reverie. "I don't mind telling you that the sooner I'm away from this place the better I shall be pleased." Rimini, the Italian, looked at Ritter and the latter nodded.

"We will go downstairs," he said, "when Elsa comes she can join us."

The eleven persons—seven men and four women—who sat round the big table might, to the casual observer, have been engaged in discussing the developments of a business concern whose affairs were in an apparently flourishing condition. If that same casual observer had been able to listen more intently, however, he would have discovered that the conversation concerned far more vital topics—the preparedness of certain nations for war. The disclosures of state secret documents, the jealously guarded plans of new weapons of defence and attack which had been either stolen or purchased by members of the Schakalbande's organisation of which these men and women were the leaders. The fate of millions of lives was represented in the papers which were being passed from hand to hand with each scrutiniser's making his or her comment.

Adolf Ritter, acting as chairman, passed a final casting vote on any question which seemed

likely to end in acrimonious argument, and decided on the amount of remuneration to be paid in future "deals."

"And now," he announced when the more important business had been finished with, "I am afraid I have some serious information to give you—Lecoitre has been arrested."

A storm of consternation greeted the remark. As much on those already aware that the agent of the Illème Bureau was in the pay of Ritter, as on those to whom the statement came in the nature of a revelation, the news had a staggering effect. Rats themselves, they knew what happened when a brother-rat was cornered—it often squealed. . . .

It was Grogan, the American, who voiced the general demand.

"How much did he know?"

Ritter shrugged his shoulders.

"He knew what every one here knows—enough to get us all life imprisonment if not the guillotine. We can't play this sort of game, my friends, without taking risks."

"How much did he tell?" was the next hotly-flung question.

"I hope he told nothing before he committed suicide—but there is just the chance, of course, that he told a good deal."

A murmur like the buzzing of a colony of angry bees greeted the further announcement.

"In which 'case'?" cried Rimini, the Italian renegade.

Ritter decided on a bold throw.

"You must find for me the man who gave Lecoitre away."

"His name—tell us his name."

"He is an Englishman named Standish—a secret

service agent at present in Paris who is known as Tiger. Elsa—”

He could not say anything more, for the door was opened and a woman, dressed in the height of fashion, entered.

Elsa Brendt looked first at Adolf Ritter and then at the faces which stared at her like so many wolves.

“What are you doing here?” she demanded.

Ritter stepped forward.

“It was necessary to call a special emergency meeting—I should have told you,” he explained.

The woman frowned at him.

“I am beginning to think there is a good deal you should have told me,” she returned.

“This is no time for quarrelling,” burst in an angry voice. “Ritter was just telling us about Lecoitre and the Englishman, Standish. That swine will have to be found; if he isn’t we shall all be jugged. . . .”

She lifted a gloved hand.

“I have just come back from Paris,” she replied. “I went there to try to find this man. I didn’t find him—”

“Then?”

“I think I know where he is to be found,” she added.

On the other side of the wall, the listener, using the walking-stick with the curious cup-like end as a sound detector, heard the words with a sense of mingled excitement and dismay. He waited, every nerve tensed.

How had the woman learned that he had left Paris that night? And had she been merely bluffing when she said that she knew where he was at the present time?

Much had happened to him since that wordy

argument with Benny Bannister. Dressed in an old, stained suit of dungarees, he had left the hotel by the servants' entrance and, taking every possible precaution against being shadowed, he had come to the obscure garage in the back street where he had already arranged to hire a dependable, if old, racing Renault. He had given the name of "Lacloix" and had said—in fluent French, very different from the stuff he had used when impersonating Alistair Cameron—that he was an electrical engineer going off on a big job. So successful had proved his bluff that the manager of the garage had not raised a single quibble. Standish had paid the money required and the 1927 Renault, over whose engine he devoted a quarter of an hour's exhaustive survey, glided out into the dark and almost deserted street.

Although he had taken so many risks during the past few years, Tiger realised, as he drove carefully but swiftly through the city, that this present job of work represented a new "high" in danger. Perhaps it was because he was getting old—but he fervently wished that the business was over. It was the words of Benny Bannister that kept returning to his mind. If Sonia arrived in Paris the following morning, to find that he was not there to greet her. . . . But he *must* be there to greet her. Once he had penetrated into the house of the Jackals and obtained sufficient conclusive proof that the place should be raided by the French Secret Service—then, Bellamy or no Bellamy, he would cry "Enough" and return to normal life again. What was this infernal itch of the soul that would not allow him to settle down into the humdrum existence of his kind? If he did not improve—if, in other words, he gave Sonia further cause for distress on his behalf—he would have to fall back on the

mildewed stunt of going to Africa to shoot big game.

Avoiding a collision with a heavy car that looked like a Mercedes, coming in the opposite direction, he pulled himself together and decided that this was no time to indulge in further reverie. If he was to put this job across, he had to concentrate on the work that stretched ahead.

In the course of time he reached a small wood four hundred yards or so away from the Château Saint-Ange, and here, after putting out his lights, he cached the car. It was not likely that any one would come across the Renault, screened as it was by the dense foliage, but in order to make doubly sure, he drove in still farther and pulled up beneath the branches of what appeared to be a giant oak.

Getting out of the car, he stretched himself in order to slacken his cramped muscles. Then, making sure that the weapons he had brought—a high-calibre revolver and a long knife—were safe, he started to walk towards his destination.

The latter was a small and dilapidated summer-house, situated in a south-westerly direction from the château. He had noticed this outbuilding in the morning when talking to M. Coret, and had then made his decision. He had two reasons—the summer-house (if that was indeed what the place was) was built against a portion of the wall which afforded comparatively easy foothold. That was the first reason. The second was that it seemed unlikely that there could be any "funny business" in the way of electrification gadgets attached to this neglected out-building. In any case, the summer-house struck him as being the best jumping-off place.

It was a dark, moonless night—a fact for which

he was profoundly thankful—but as he crept carefully out of the wood, he looked about him with keen, searching eyes. Even though the Schakalbande believed themselves secure, the very suspicious-minded Ritter, who was in charge of its sinister activities, would probably have scouts out after nightfall.

Yet, as he continued on his way, he could see nothing suspicious—nothing, that was, until, as he crossed the rough track that ran outside the walls of the château grounds, he noticed a figure move in the darkness.

Tiger stopped immediately and fell on all fours. As he did so, something whistled over his head. The very spot which he had considered suitable for his purpose was guarded!

He heard oncoming feet, a growling voice.

“Get up, you swine!”

The man must have seen him. Just as he was about to pull out his own revolver, a strong arc of light splayed from a powerful electric torch and encircled him. A move—and he knew he would be dead. This was a time and occasion when it was necessary to play ‘possum.

He groaned—most realistically.

The man, thinking, no doubt, that he had got his bird, stooped over him—and in that moment, Tiger, taking an appalling risk, reached out both his hands and caught the fellow by the neck. In just such a manner had he strangled at least three of his former enemies—he had got to know the trick by this time. . . .

It did not take long. It was a nasty, disgusting business, but this fellow had to be silenced, and the only effective way was to kill him. So he exerted the necessary pressure. . . .

But now that it was all over, and he felt his nerves twitching from the strain, there was still something else to be done. The body must not be left there. This guard might be relieved, and whilst his absence would be disconcerting, his dead body would have a still more alarming effect. So, whilst regretting the time spent in the task, Tiger did not undertake the job proper until he had draggéd the body into the undergrowth and made sure that it was safe from any prying eyes—even although those eyes were behind a powerful electric torch.

Then, this done, he returned to the château wall, took another swift look round, and began the ascent.

CHAPTER XXIX

THE BLACK MAW

HE arrived at the top of the wall without mishap; evidently he had been correct in his assumption: the system of electrification, which he had no doubt existed in some form or other, did not presumably include this outside wall; perhaps Ritter preferred the fly-in-the-spider's-parlour scheme, waiting until the intruder was actually in the house before he started any of his funny stuff.

The particular portion of the summer-house roof to which he climbed, after jumping from the top of the wide wall, threatened to collapse with his weight from the moment he stepped on it, and before he could attempt to save himself, he had fallen with a crash through the rotten structure, landing, after what seemed an interminable period, on something so hard it hurt like the very devil.

Feeling bruised in every inch of his body, with his mouth, nostrils and eyes choked with dust, he switched on the small electric torch he had been afraid to use before.

To his surprise, he discovered that what had appeared so dilapidated outside was well kept inside. And there was an absence of the gardening tools and other impedimenta which he had expected. The floor on which he had landed with such force was, he discovered, composed of smooth flagstones and was kept so well brushed that it was entirely innocent of dirt. The place was quite empty.

There was something funny here. What was the object of keeping this apparently derelict summer-house free from debris of any kind? There must be an explanation.

He closely examined the door, only to find that it was immovable. It had evidently been nailed up from the outside, so that it no longer fulfilled its original purpose.

The one window which the place had formerly boasted was also useless as a means of escape—a stout piece of wood had been fixed over it, also from the outside; and after the first attempt Tiger knew that any further endeavours to wrench this free would be useless. A quick examination with his torch convinced him of one very important point: that, unless he got up on to the roof again—a feat of agility which even to him was impossible—he had to reconcile himself to being a prisoner in that confounded summer-house. It seemed monstrously absurd—but there it was.

It was whilst he was examining the walls with more minute care than he had previously used that he noticed what appeared to be a crude bellpush.

This was curious—what purpose could such a thing fulfil ?

He hesitated a moment. This might be a trap ; it might start some deviltry working. Then, whistling softly between his teeth—an infallible sign of inward excitement—he took what he guessed might be a desperate chance and pressed the bell-push. Immediately he had a shock. The floor beneath his feet was sinking. It descended gently and with the smoothness of a well-oiled lift.

How long the complete descent took Tiger could not estimate, but he calculated that at least twenty seconds must have passed before the floor came to rest without any jarring. It was pitch dark at the bottom of the shaft into which this novel lift had descended, but the light from the electric torch, which he flashed downwards in a guarded manner, showed him a newly-tunnelled passage. The floor and walls of this passage were simply earth, but shifting his light upwards he found that the roof had been carefully shored up with good, thick sleepers. The passage itself was a little short of six feet in height—he had to stoop slightly when he started to walk along it—and approximately four feet in width.

This seemed a night of surprises, for when he had got out of the "lift" the floor of the summer-house began to ascend again.

This was the very devil of a situation. There appeared to be no outlet from the passage, either to the right or to the left ; but choosing the former Tiger decided to explore. One fact struck him at once. Although the passage was in total darkness, with no sign of activity of any kind, the decent air which he was breathing told him that by some means it must be well ventilated.

He made his way gingerly along the passage, feeling with his left hand and shielding his torchlight as much as possible. After going perhaps thirty yards, his fingers touched what appeared to be a crudely made door, and after a lapse of a few more minutes he made up his mind to investigate what might be on the other side.

After carefully trying the door—which, to his surprise, opened at his touch—he found himself in a kind of temporary store. Here were the gardening tools, together with a number of spades and picks—which he had expected to find in the summer-house. The picks had evidently been recently used in the tunnelling operations. On pegs hanging from the wall he saw several suits of brown dungarees, such as are worn by artificers in engineering shops. The first thought that came to him on sighting these was the knowledge that, as a last resource, he would be able to pass himself off as a labourer who, by some mischance, had been left behind in the rough!

He started to change, in the cramped space, his own dungarees for a suit of the workmen's. The colour would blend better with the general scheme. In the darkness of the passage he also plastered his face over with some of the damp earth from the wall.

Leaving the toolhouse, he shut the door and then proceeded farther along the passage. He soon had his reward. From a short distance ahead he heard the murmur of subdued voices.

The temptation to use his torch was now very great, but he conquered it to the extent of only utilising the light when he found it absolutely necessary in order to guide his direction and to give him warning of anything likely to obstruct his path.

The murmur of voices drew him on irresistibly;

they acted as a magnet that could not be withstood. The belief that he would shortly be getting at one of the secrets of this extraordinary stronghold of the enemy forced every other thought out of his mind.

Releasing the safety-catch of his revolver, he crept on. The sound of the voices was now so near that he was forced to switch off the electric torch and chance to luck.

His left hand, which he was now using as a "feeler," eventually came up against something which felt like a thick blanket. As he began to tug it gently, it yielded, and he found, after a further test, that it acted as a kind of screen to a good-sized room.

Looking round the side of the blanket screen, he saw three men, all wearing eye-shades such as tennis players affect at big tournaments.

But these men, so intent on their work, were far removed from tennis players. Tiger knew them to be master craftsmen, working at a particularly tricky branch of criminality. They were forgers—engaged in producing the passports with which the agents of the Schakalbande penetrated into the countries whose secrets they were determined to steal. So much could be learned from their conversation.

Crouched against the wall, Tiger continued to listen—and what he heard both stimulated and disheartened him. From the disjointed remarks of the men he was able to learn that he had chosen a good time for his visit of inspection—a full gathering of the Jackals had been called for that very night, and the members of the conference were now actually at the Château Saint-Ange, discussing present business and future activities.

Presently the man who appeared to be the leader of the three rose from his seat, switched off the

powerful electric light by which he had been working, removed his eyeshade—and yawned.

"Well, that job's done, boys," he remarked in the argot of the Paris stews. "And now I'm going up to the house to have a drink—you'd better come with me; they're sharing out the money at eleven o'clock," looking at the watch strapped to his skinny wrist, "and we'd better be there with the rest. Who knows?" adding a foul, blasphemous oath.

Tiger's heart was beating like a trip-hammer. His moods of fierce stimulation and deep depression had alternated swiftly—stimulation due to his luck so far, and depression because he saw no chance of its continuing. How could he hope to get to the house from this labyrinth of passages? He could see the purpose of the summer-house lift now—it was to provide the workmen—those who had done the tunnelling with a short cut to their toil.

He had felt like groaning with chagrin until the leader's last remark. Now his hopes rose again. If those men were going back to the house, then somehow or other, by hook or by crook, he was going with them.

Then he had a shock.

"This way, you fool!" he heard the leader add—and the man's voice was so close that he knew the fellow must be standing within a few feet of him.

He dared not be discovered—not so much because the opposition represented three to one as because he had to play safe until such time as he had achieved his purpose. So, retreating as noiselessly as possible, he went back on his tracks with the idea of concealing himself in the toolhouse tucked away in the wall of the passage.

It was terribly difficult going. For one thing, he dared not show his light, and for another, he was

afraid of stumbling and of the consequent sound's arousing the suspicions of the men he could hear following behind.

Where was that door? In the deep gloom he must have missed it, but fumbling about, he found himself at length opposite a recess. Making sure that the ground would hold him, he stepped back—and he was only just in time, for a few seconds later the three forgers passed him so closely that he could feel their breath on his face.

Now——!

In his anxiety to follow them he must somehow have lost his balance. In any case, he was compelled to step backwards—and in the next moment disaster came.

For he felt himself falling—falling—falling. . . .
A black maw had swallowed him up.

Grogan, the American, shouted out a demand.

"What do you mean when you say you know where Standish is?" he cried.

Elsa Brendt looked at him so fiercely that he gave ground.

"Exactly what any one who isn't such a fool as you have proved yourself to be would think I meant—that Standish is either in the house at this very moment or he is on his way."

"How do you know this?" It was Ritter who had now taken up the questioning.

"Because I used my brains—which is more than some people have done," she retorted quickly. "This morning, when I left here, I told you that I was going to Paris to find Standish."

"And did you?"

"Yes—but it took several hours. When I arrived at the hotel in which he is now staying it was too

late ; he had gone. But," seething under the grin on Ritter's face, " I found out what I wanted."

" And what was that ? "

She turned away from him, for the expression on his face had become unendurable.

" I saw his servant—a man named Bannister. He wouldn't talk at first, was suspicious, as all well-trained English servants are suspicious of people they do not know. But after I had convinced him I was a friend of his mistress——"

" You posed as a friend of Standish's wife ? " Rimini, his Latin mind appreciating the jest, broke into a peal of cackling laughter.

" As a very dear friend—you don't think that I wasted the time I recently spent in London, do you ? It took me some while to gain the man's confidence, as I have told you, but once he had started, his very anxiety made him open his heart fully. He explained that his master—Tiger Standish, that is—had given him a tremendous amount of worry lately because he knew he was engaged on some special work (he wouldn't commit himself, even to me, more definitely than that) in which Standish had encountered the most terrible dangers, and had daily, even hourly, risked his life. I think we know what that work must be. But—and I come now to the important point—Standish had promised him that after to-night—remember the words—after to-night he would be through. There was some special hazard due to be taken to-night, but after that the whole thing would be wound up because his wife was joining him in Paris to-morrow morning. Now let us consider the further facts," went on the speaker, addressing the company generally. " I know to my certain knowledge that Standish has already paid two visits to the Château Saint-Ange."

"Is that true?" It seemed Grogan's day for firing questions.

Ritter temporised.

"All I can tell you is that if this damned swine of an Englishman comes here to-night, I shall be ready for him."

"But, according to Elsa, he *is* here," persisted the Italian.

Ritter sneered.

"Well, she should know—she is in love with him."

"What!" Following on Grogan's tempestuous ejaculation, several of the company sprang from their chairs.

It was a testing moment, but the woman faced it unafraid—faced it and came through triumphantly.

"That is Ritter's favourite joke," Elsa Brendt commented coolly. "One day I shall become tired of it, and then he will be sorry his humour did not take a different form. Is it likely," she went on, "that I should have any affection for the only man who has ever beaten me twice following?"

Her beauty and that vital quality which marked her out from all other women engaged in her hazardous trade carried the day. At least, the men were impressed. The grimness went out of their faces, and they smiled at her before turning to frown at their leader.

All except one, that was. He was not quick enough, neither was he astute enough, to mask his real feelings. Elsa Brendt had noticed him from the moment she had entered that underground room—had noticed and watched. The suspicion which had been growing in her mind since she first remarked that the man evaded her glance by turning away, was so grave that it was necessary she should be positive before she gave it voice.

But now she *was* positive.

"Grogan," she called in an authoritative voice, "stand by that door, and shoot any one who tries to escape."

Consternation broke loose. Such an order could only mean one thing.

The woman confirmed the surmise.

"That man sitting there," pointing to the ashen-faced wretch whose teeth were chattering, "is a spy," she said. "His name is Otto Kabisch and he works for Crosber. He has come here to betray us."

Even in his extremity the man could not repress a feeling of admiration. What nerve, what colossal assurance—knowing that she herself had been betrayed, realising that once he was allowed to leave that place he would inform Crosber of her double-crossing, she had taken the bold but only possible course. It would mean his death, but even that dread fear could not force him to deny her cleverness.

Ritter, shouting louder than any of his subordinates, now took command.

"This is a grave statement to make," he said, staring at the woman, "and in the interests of us all you will have to substantiate it."

"I am ready to do so," was the answer. "Who brought this man here?"

There followed a long story by--of all people—Rimini, the most zealous worker the Schakalbande possessed. He had picked up the man in the underworld of Paris, he explained, had tested him thoroughly, had found that he had facilities for acquiring a good deal of information which Ritter himself had declared to be valuable, and feeling every confidence by this means in the new recruit, had decided to bring him along to that evening's conference.

"It is not possible that I have been deceived," the Italian went on vociferously. "Are you sure about your information?" he demanded of Elsa Brendt.

The woman was quick in her reply.

"I am so certain that I am willing to stake a thousand pounds on the result. Take off that man's coat, roll up his right shirt sleeve, and you will find a bullet wound in the upper arm."

Three men flung themselves on the suspected traitor.

Within a minute, Elsa Brendt was triumphant.

"What did I tell you?" she said—for there, plain for all to see, was the deep sear in the flesh that she had spoken about. "I was actually working with Kabisch when he was shot; it was eighteen months ago at Toulon."

Ritter cut in.

"Enough of this," he ordered. "Take him away. I promise that the Schakalbande shall receive entire satisfaction."

When the man had been hustled from the room he turned to Elsa Brendt.

"Thank you, my dear," and for once his voice was not ungracious.

CHAPTER XXX

IN THE HANDS OF THE ENEMY

TIGER came to earth with a jolt that jarred every inch of his spine. Scrambling to his feet, he was rather surprised to find that there were no missing parts, and satisfied on this count he started to have a look round.

An early discovery was that he must have fallen into what had once been an old well, but which the Schakalbande had very cleverly adapted for another lift shaft. What the object of this extensive subterranean tunnelling was, he could not decide, unless Ritter and his co-director, Elsa Brendt, wanted a comprehensive underground sanctuary in case the Château Saint-Ange was raided.

So much was he able to ascertain by the light of his electric torch whilst hearing the passage of men above. Now that he had the light to help him, he was able to see that his fall had not been more than fifteen feet, and by the exercise of strength and agility, he was able, in the course of about ten minutes, to work his way up the shaft-way, when he found himself in the passage again along which the three forgers had gone.

This was evidently the way out of the labyrinth, and he carried on in the direction taken by these three members of the Schakalbande. After a dozen yards or so he found that the passage bifurcated. Deciding to take the right of the Y, he came shortly afterwards to what looked to be a solid brick wall. This was evidently a dead end, and he had to return.

Taking this time the left fork of the Y, he discovered something much more interesting. "By the aid of his torchlight he was able to spot what appeared to be two dog irons driven into the end wall, and each of these had a coating of new earth as though recently trodden on. By mounting the lower dog iron with his left foot, and then bringing his right foot up and placing it on the upper iron, he was able to draw his head and shoulders close up to the roof of the passage. He pressed with his right shoulder and was amazed to find that the end wall of the passage revolved. A few moments later, Tiger was in a dimly lit cellar or basement. From the other end he could hear the low murmur of voices. Advancing cautiously, and taking out the "sounding" stick he had brought for that very purpose, he stooped and placed the cup-like end against the brickwork. This giant stethoscope—for so it might be described—was instrumental in magnifying the previous murmurs so that he was now able to hear clearly every word that was spoken on the other side of the wall.

It was impossible for him to see through bricks and mortar, of course, but he thanked his lucky stars, nevertheless, for he now knew that he had stumbled on the real den of the Schakalbande. Apart from a few rooms, the Coret mansion above ground must be simply a deserted house, whilst the basement cellars had been transformed into well-appointed and furnished headquarters—no doubt with sleeping rooms and a huge community-room. This latter was obviously where the present conference was being held.

He was not the only intruder, it appeared, at that meeting of the Jackals. Poor devil, he'd have to try to get the captured spy away from these

fiends by some means or other—even although Kabisch worked for an opposition force, he couldn't allow—

At this moment something diverted Tiger's attention. It was a step behind him. So absorbed had he been in following the drama taking place on the other side of that brick wall that he had lost all thought for himself for the time being.

Now he was to pay the penalty. Three men, all holding revolvers, stood confronting him as he swung round on his haunches.

Too late to use his own gun, he leapt at the nearest man, but fell backwards as the latter fired. . . .

How long had elapsed he did not know—the awakening was sufficient for his present purpose.

It was a bitter moment. Standing over him as he lay stretched helpless—strong ropes bound him to this truckle bed—were his two relentless enemies, Adolf Ritter and Elsa Brendt. He did not know in that moment whom he had to fear most.

It was Ritter who spoke first.

"We expected you, Mr. Standish—and here you are! Yes," the scathingly mocking voice continued, "in spite of your third disguise as a workman employed by the Schakalbande, neither Ftaulein Brendt nor myself had any difficulty in recognising you as the once-redoubtable Tiger Standish, the ace of the British Secret Service. All that now remains is for you to tell us exactly how much you know—that you know something—enough, that is, to endanger the safety of the organisation which we control—is beyond dispute. You swine," added the speaker quickly, "I could kill you now."

Indeed, it seemed probable that the threat would

be carried into operation. Intervention came from an unexpected quarter : the woman caught Ritter's arm as he was about to plunge it into a coat pocket.

"Not yet," she urged, "there is plenty of time, and no fear of his escaping. Not yet . . . he has a good deal to tell us first, don't you agree?"

Ritter made her an elaborate bow.

"You are right, as usual, my dear. But, by God, I will see that he *does* tell us. . . . Yes, what is it?" as a knock came on the door.

"Everything is ready," answered a voice from what seemed to the prisoner to be a considerable distance. His head was still muzzy ; the pain in his left shoulder throbbed like the very dickens. . . .

"I'll be back in a few minutes," announced the man who had been taunting him. "Coming, Elsa?"

"I'll stay for a few minutes."

"None of your funny business, mind," warned Ritter. "I have stood a great deal, but I will not stand for that."

She smiled at him satirically.

"You needn't be afraid," she replied.

The door closed behind him with a bang.

Left alone with the man she had sworn to capture, Elsa Brendt drew a chair to the side of the truckle bed and sat down.

"Well," she announced, "isn't it funny? I took an oath to be revenged on you, Tiger Standish—and here you are."

"My own fault entirely," stated the prisoner. "I say, is it permissible to ask for a cigarette? They give condemned prisoners what they like to eat in the morning—at least, in civilised countries—and I hope that the regulations here are not more severe."

" You shall have a cigarette when I have finished. In the meantime, I think it would be advisable for you to pay attention to what I am saying."

" All right, carry on ; but don't forget the fag. And this shoulder—is anything being done for it ? "

" You were lucky—the bullet merely grazed the skin."

" Well, it hurts like the devil, anyway."

" Surely," scoffed the woman, bending forward, " the great Tiger Standish, the ace of the British Secret Service, is not going to complain of a little pain ? I am afraid that what is in store for you will be . . . well, we will not come to that yet."

" Oh, don't mind me. You see, I happened to hear what was going on on the other side of the wall just now and—"

" Do you know why Ritter left the room a moment ago ? " she broke in. " It was to supervise the arrangements for the—shall we say cross-examination of that damned spy, Kabisch."

Tiger frowned.

" I see."

" You think you ' see.' But let me tell you that you can have no conception of what is going to happen to that man. Ritter has at his disposal a whole multitude of electrical appliances, invented by the man who owns this château and who is a world-famous—but I suppose you know all that ? "

" My angel," he returned, " I do know it. But please do not break off, your voice fascinates me. I am utterly unmanned."

" You're a brave man, Standish, but you will want all your courage soon. That is why I stayed behind just now instead of going out with Ritter. I am in a quandary," she went on. " You see, I stand between two fires."

"And two masters. What does our old pal Crosber say to all this?" Although he was in such a parlous position, Tiger could not resist the temptation to pull her leg. "Rather an interesting situation, I should imagine," he went on, watching her face closely. "On the one hand you are supposed to be working for Crosber, whilst on the other you allow one of his men to be tortured. . . . Well, every one to his—or, rather, her—taste."

"You are wasting time," she told him in an even voice. "I was going to explain the exact position. Crosber has offered twenty thousand marks for your body, dead or alive. I think he would prefer it alive, but on the other hand, Ritter, as you have been able to see for yourself, is determined that you shall not bother us much longer."

"Yes, it *is* an interesting position—what are you going to do about it?"

Tiger, for all his nonchalance, felt his nerves quivering. He knew that this woman—if it served her purpose—would show no more mercy than Adolf Ritter himself.

"I have a proposition to make," she stated surprisingly.

"Do you think I ought to listen to it?"

"Be serious! Ritter may be back at any moment."

"Well, tell me your proposition—I don't see how it can be worth tuppence-ha'penny in any case, but do tell me."

Her eyes glared at him.

"You have one chance—and one chance only—of escaping not merely death, but the most horrible torture," she said. "That chance rests with me."

He laughed.

"Don't tell me that the beautiful woman spy has

fallen in love with the enemy secret service agent," he scoffed.

Her voice sank to a steely whisper.

"Some women in my place would have your tongue cut out for that—and believe me, Tiger Standish, I am in a position to see that such a thing would be done; so please don't try any more humour at my expense. The proposition I was about to make no longer holds good; I won't waste any more time or thought on it—you must take the consequences."

Her face had become a mask, but the smouldering eyes told how deeply he had wounded her vanity. Fool though he told himself he was, Standish felt a certain satisfaction in having given this woman her *conge* even before she had made the offer. To have started to barter on such terms as she would have proposed was unthinkable.

The door opened and Ritter looked in.

"Everything is ready, my dear," he stated. "I will leave the door ajar, so that our friend can hear for himself."

Without a look at the prisoner, Elsa Brendt rose and walked towards the speaker. The next moment Tiger was alone.

Alone, that was, except for his thoughts. For, almost immediately after Ritter and the woman had disappeared, a series of agonising screams, coming from the next room or cellar, filled his ears and brain with terrifying conjectures. The man whom Crosber had sent to spy out the secrets of the Schakalbande was being put to the question. . . .

The terrible ordeal lasted for perhaps five minutes. During that time wave after wave of horrific outbursts had lacerated his nerves almost to the point

of insanity ; but he clenched his fists and held on to his self-control.

It was over at last—and then the door opened again and Elsa Brendt returned.

“ I have just a minute,” she said in a low tone. “ What you have heard that wretch suffer will be nothing to what Ritter will do to you if—— ”

He knew that she was testing him, but he was determined not to show his hand. So he kept silent.

“ If you are willing to work for the Schakalbande I may perhaps be able to save your life. Won’t you ? ” she pleaded, her voice now very gentle.

“ Go to hell,” he told her sternly—but even then she kissed him on the lips.

The arrival of Ritter brought another note into that tense atmosphere.

“ The man is dead—he was glad enough to die, just as he was glad enough to tell us everything I wanted to know,” announced the head of the Schakalbande, crossing to the prisoner. “ Are you willing to tell me everything I want to know, Standish ? ”

Tiger felt the influence of the woman’s eyes, even though he was not looking at her. If ever a man was in a tough spot, he was at the present time. Consummately conceited ass that he had been to attempt this thing alone ! Although he had obeyed orders, he should have gone to de Chauny—after all, this was as much France’s concern as England’s ; even more her business, if it came to that—and asked for some help. Now there wasn’t one chance in a million of his being able to get clear.

“ Don’t be in a hurry ; no doubt you want time to regain your nerve—and perhaps your senses. What happened in there,” pointing, “ just now was, I must confess, not a pretty sight,” continued Ritter.

"I pride myself on being fairly strong-nerved—after all, I have been in espionage work for a good many years now, and you yourself know that our class of business does not induce squeamishness—but . . . well, you heard for yourself, so I will not say anything more.

"There are many facts I want to know from you, Standish, and I should advise you to give me truthful answers. Between us—Fraulein Brendt and myself, I mean—we shall know more or less whether they *are* truthful. You have been a great nuisance to us, and we are determined to get rid of you. Even the fact that my very charming codirector has received the munificent offer of twenty thousand marks from an interested party for your body, dead or alive, will not alter my fixed determination to pass you on to another sphere. . . . But if you wish to save yourself the trouble caused to the man who is now being buried, you will answer my questions promptly and without quibble."

The prisoner yawned.

"I have just been sufficiently ungallant to request this lady to betake herself to Hades; and God only knows what I shall be forced to say to you, Ritter, if you don't leave me alone."

For a few moments it seemed likely that the man he had challenged would have a stroke. Ritter's face became congested with blood; his eyes seemed likely to leave their sockets.

Finally he mastered himself sufficiently to speak.

"Very good," he said. "You have dared to treat me with effrontery. In that you are merely living up to your reputation. You also have the reputation of being a brave—a very brave—man. Believe me, I am being sincere when I say that your courage will now be tested to the full. Swine of an Englishman,

you do not seem even yet to grasp your exact position. There is not one chance in ten million of your leaving this place alive. You are absolutely at my mercy. I can put you to the most indescribable agony by means of the appliances in the next room. Should, by some inconceivable chance, rescue be on the way to you, I could demolish the whole château by merely pulling a switch. No doubt, in the course of your wanderings here, you wondered at the excavation work that has been done. Well, I will give you the reason. In the event of our headquarters being raided, I could demolish everything above ground whilst remaining secure in these subterranean rooms. Now do you understand ? ”

Standish understood only too well, but he had set his course and could not depart from it. He was not going to let this rat believe that he was afraid of him. When the time arrived he prayed that he would be able to summon up sufficient fortitude to hold out for at least a decent space ; that was as much as he could hope for now.

“ The circumstances being as they are, there is no need for any haste,” the harsh voice of his captor continued. “ Half an hour’s reflection, for instance, will no doubt be beneficial. In any event, I have some work to do which calls for immediate attention. Since you have proved yourself so curious, Standish, I see no harm in telling you now that it is the monthly paying-out night of the Schakalbande. We have done quite a lot of good business during the past few weeks—especially since you arrived in Paris with the laudable intention of smashing up the organisation—oh, by the way, you may be interested to know that I have experienced the utmost difficulty so far in restraining our members from bursting in here and killing you on the spot—and I

have several bonuses to present. . . . I think this time you had better come with me, Elsa. Our friend ought not to have any interruptions to his soliloquy."

Tiger watched them go with the same indomitable look imprinted on his face that his other enemies—those he had fought and conquered in the past—had got to know so well ; but as soon as he was alone he groaned like a man who knows utter despair.

His thoughts had travelled far from those underground cells of torture and death : they had gone winging back to England—to the matter-of-fact but pleasant town of Worcester. There he could see Sonia, a song on her lips, making ready, with a light heart and deft fingers, for her trip to Paris. How happy she must be at that very moment !

His brain, working at abnormal pressure, was able to follow her in the journey to town. Another mental picture came—this time not such a pleasant one : his wife was sitting in a corner of a first-class carriage, staring out of the window. What were her thoughts ? He knew ; in the midst of her happiness a phantom had stalked—a phantom of fear. She was speculating on what had happened to him over in Paris. Knowing him so well, she was afraid . . .

He was able to visualise her arriving at the big London terminus. A porter followed her slim figure as she walked up the platform and engaged a taxi.

What was the address she was giving the man ? Ah ! He thought so. It was the little office in that cul de sac off Whitehall where Sir Harker Bellamy, his chief, sat plotting and counter-plotting. . . .

Still following his wife in thought, he saw her arrive at the office, where she was met with disappointment. That had been inevitable, because had not Bellamy written to him that he was going to be away from London himself ?

She would be met by Fortescue, the chief secretary. Fortescue, circumspect to his finger-tips, and as tight-lipped as an oyster in any case, would know nothing. He would be sorry for the wife of his Chief's favourite agent—but he would know nothing. As a matter of fact, Tiger, writhing now in his bonds, was very doubtful whether Bellamy had told Fortescue a single thing about this expedition ; but, even if he had done so, the secretary would gravely shake his head and say that "so far as he knew, Mr. Standish was quite well—but, really, Mrs. Standish, I am entirely in the dark concerning his present whereabouts."

That would be a staggering blow for his darling. She would cross to Paris in a fever of unrest and dismay. And, once at the Gare du Nord, she would speed with all haste to the small hotel the address of which he had sent her as his last address.

There she would meet Benny. Now, what would Benny tell her ?

His homely face puckered with his own private anxiety concerning his master, Bannister might or might not give Sonia his full confidence. But, if he attempted to temporise or prevaricate in any way, Sonia, with her woman's intuition, would not be deceived. She would get at the truth—or, at least, as much of the truth as Benny knew himself—within a few minutes.

And then what ?

Knowing herself to be powerless, for she would not be able to tell any one—Bellamy, if she ran across him in Paris, or even the officials of the British Embassy, where no doubt she would go as a last resource—she might even—but, no. Sonia was made of different stuff from that. But with that

awful dread knocking at her heart and paralysing her brain—with nothing left to live for. . . .

In that moment he felt he could have killed Sir Harker Bellamy if the man with the grey face, cold, glinting eyes and heart of stone wherever duty was concerned, had stepped into the room.

Tiger laughed—harshly, discordantly. What a hope ! Bellamy had left this job to him, considering him competent to deal with it. That in itself was a compliment—and the Secret Service Chief whom his enemies knew as "The Mole" was not lavish with his compliments.

And this was the result : he was lying, a helpless prisoner, bound hand and foot, unable to move—and with a frightful death from indescribable torture awaiting him. How long had that swine Ritter said ? Half an hour ?

Twenty-five minutes left of life !—for five must have been already ticked off since he had been left to brood alone.

His mind turned momentarily on the woman. What was the proposition she had been about to make to him when he had so crudely interrupted ? Was there a chance—the barest possible chance—left in that direction ? Supposing she returned to make him this offer—in return for his life would he consent to join the Schakalbande ?

He laughed again—and even to his own ears the sound seemed cracked and utterly unnatural. Was he losing his reason ? Would that precious pair, Brendt and Ritter, return to find that he had gone mad ? That he was in danger of something of the sort was clear from the fact that such a thought as had just passed through his mind should come to him at all.

Yet for the sake of Sonia he had to consider every and any possibility.

The terrible picture of his wife wandering disconsolate through the corridors of the Paris hotel, trying (with Benny Bannister plodding at her heels) to think of some way out of this agonising puzzle in which she found herself, a tragic player of Blind Man's Bluff, made him strain with all his strength at the ropes that bound him to the small iron bedstead. If this had not been fixed to the floor by some means which he could not ascertain, he would have toppled the whole contraption over. As it was, although he struggled until he felt the blood pounding in his veins, the effort was useless: he had not been able to move the taut ropes an inch.

He had just abandoned the hope of ever getting free when the door at the other end of the room opened and a procession of men and women, whose faces were hidden, entered. At their head were Elsa Brendt and Adolf Ritter. They alone were unmasked.

It was the latter who started to explain.

"Sorry to intrude on your reflections, Standish," he said, "but, although I had intended to keep your privacy inviolate, I have been forced to yield to popular clamour. The fact is that the different members of the Schakalbande, gathered here to-night as I have already informed you, for the purpose of the usual monthly business meeting, have expressed such a keen desire to see you before . . ." He broke off to continue quickly: "They all know, of course, that it will be their last chance of gazing upon the features of the redoubtable Tiger Standish this side of Jordan. I hope you have no objection?"

Somehow he managed to reply—and in his usual bantering tone.

"None whatever. You might apologise to the distinguished company of Jackals for my present indisposition and tell them that I hope to be up and about within a few hours."

A peal of merriment greeted the sally. Tiger noticed that it was Elsa Brendt who had laughed.

But Ritter did not smile—neither, so far as he could tell, did any of the faces behind those sinister-appearing black silk masks. The wearers filed past him, their eyes glaring malevolently into his.

"Too bad I can't recognise any of you," commented the prisoner, "but you will have to take the will for the deed; I am sure you will understand. However, you have only yourselves to blame, you know. Why, in the somewhat peculiar circumstances, do you trouble to wear those disfiguring masks?"

A thin, snarling voice came from one of the prowling men.

"We have wasted enough time, Ritter—let us finish this farce. I have a supper appointment in Paris, but before I go . . ."

The chief of the Schakalbande stepped forward and took the speaker by the arm.

"Allow me, Standish, to present Signor Benito Rimini. He is an Italian, but he does not happen to like the Duce, and so he has thrown in his lot with us. To-night Signor Rimini—who is one of my most zealous workers—was forced to suffer a grievous disappointment: a man in whom he had put entire faith was proved to be a spy. That was the man whose cries you heard. . . . Being of a very conscientious nature, Signor Rimini is anxious to see that justice is done in your case—and, after what I have told him, he is convinced that you are a far greater danger to the continued success of the

organisation of which he is such a distinguished and useful member than the insignificant agent of Carl Crosber, who will receive the tongue of his spy by to-morrow's post. . . . So, if you have no objections, we will start now on you."

At a sign from the speaker, two men, carrying what appeared to be huge screw-drivers, approached the bed. They stooped, and Tiger heard the bite of the steel blades against something fixed to the floor.

The job was soon done.

Then Standish felt the bed on which he was lying, a helpless prisoner, being lifted.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE INFERNO

"LIKE a patient being carried into the operating theatre," remarked Ritter.

Before, there had been a tense hush ; these men and women, callous and hardened to a remarkable degree—due, no doubt, to their trade—appeared to be unaffected by the prospect of a fellow creature's going to an awful death.

At a sign from Ritter, four men advanced to the bed. They started to lift it—

Then a cry rang out.

"I won't stand for it ! I won't stand for it ! "

Every one present turned to see who had made the protest. Elsa Brendt, her hands uplifted, her face flushed and her whole body working with excitement, faced Ritter like an accuser.

"What won't you stand for, my dear ? " he asked in a dry, harsh tone.

"I've seen enough to-night. . . . I can't stand any more . . . I won't have Standish tortured—do you hear?" hysteria now riding her hard; "I won't have him tortured!"

There was silence for a moment, and then Ritter, addressing the company at large, said:

"There would appear to be some slight mistake here. The fair Elsa has evidently lost her nerve—and I think I know the reason why."

There was so much menace in his tone that even the overwrought woman sensed impending danger.

"What do you mean?" she demanded.

He ignored her, continuing to address the company.

"To-night, thanks to Fraulein Brendt, a traitor in our midst was unmasked. As a consequence of our subsequent action, the man Kabisch was made to pay for his sin—after giving us all the information concerning his activities with Carl Crosber that we required. That much you already know. What you don't know," went on the speaker, raising his voice and flinging himself into a tirade of passion, "is that this woman here," pointing to Elsa Brendt, "is herself a traitress—yes, an arch-traitress!"

A confused murmur of voices arose.

"Strong words, Ritter," stated Grogan, the American.

"Strong words, I know—but I can prove them. This woman works not only for the Schakalbande—but also for Crosber! That was why, my friends, she denounced Kabisch: she was afraid that Kabisch would get in first. But retribution came—as it always will: just before he died Kabisch told me his last secret—"

"The words of a tortured man driven mad by pain," commented Grogan scornfully.

"Nevertheless, I knew what he told me to be

true. I have suspected for some time that this woman had wormed her way into our favour for the direct purpose of selling us to the man who, if he had his way, would blow us all to hell. Isn't the very fact that she wishes to save this swine of an Englishman sufficient to prove that what Kabisch told me is correct? As a matter of fact, I know that she has received a private offer of twenty thousand marks to keep Standish alive."

"From whom?"

"From Crosber."

"Why should Crosber wish him to be kept alive?"

"That, my American friend, is more than I can tell you—no doubt the old fox has a sufficiently good reason. And, in any event," continued the harsh and strident voice, "I am not here to waste words with those who work under me. I would remind you all that, with another traitor in our midst, our very organisation is at stake. And not merely our organisation but our lives. Am I or am I not in control of the Schakalbande? Answer me!"

"Yes! Yes!" rose a chorus of voices.

"Very well, then. What are you going to do with this woman? Is she to continue to live to betray us to our enemies?"

"No! No!"

•"Will you leave it to me to deal with her?"

"Yes."

What followed was horrible. Before Elsa Brendt could defend herself—before any one could leap forward to protect her—Ritter's hands were at her throat. He squeezed and squeezed . . . his face convulsed with fury. Tiger, watching, saw that the man had turned berserk, that he had lost all resemblance to a human being, that he was now merely a

brutish fiend intent on murder in order to satisfy his sadistic lust. . . .

The spectacle was so horrific that no one stirred—and then came the end, with Ritter throwing the lifeless body away from him.

"So perish all traitors!" he croaked in a voice that did not sound human.

It was at that moment that Tiger felt a hand touching his arm. Turning, he saw, to his amazement, the deaf-mute Christophe. Whence this poor wretch had come he did not know—it was sufficient that he was there. And then despair seized him again; he could not hope to communicate with this afflicted creature.

Christophe looked at him intently, and then put a hand up as though warning him to be cautious.

The next moment he had disappeared.

A shudder seemed to go through the whole room; hardened as these men and women were, this brutal killing had affected them so that none was able to speak.

Only Ritter.

Looking like a demon unloosed, the head of the Jackals pointed to his prisoner.

"Take him into the other room—we'll learn some news from England," he rasped.

This pain was greater than any he could have conceived; every nerve in his body seemed a red-hot wire, torturing him beyond description.

Everything was black; he did not know whether his eyes had been bandaged or not, but out of the darkness there came a voice.

"Who sent you to Paris?"

He could not answer; speech of any kind was beyond him.

"Was it Bellamy?"

Still he could not speak.

Then a shout arose.

"What's gone wrong with the lights?" A babble arose, above which sounded shouts from the men and screams from the women. Highest of all climbed Ritter's shriek: "Who the devil's messing about with the power?"

Suddenly, as though by a miracle, Tiger felt surcease from his agony. And in that moment he felt hands tumbling over his body. On the top of his terrible ordeal, he would have cried out if an intuitive sense had not warned him to be silent.

These were helping hands.

"As soon as you are free," said a whispered voice, "creep away on your hands and knees towards the left. I shall be in front of you."

Bellamy's voice! Whilst the hubbub continued he felt the ropes binding him being loosened one by one.

"Now!" said the mysterious voice again.

He found himself being lifted, and then his groping hands and feet felt something solid. The floor, of course. . . . Obeying his instructions, he began to crawl after the man whose left foot he had just touched.

• In and out of legs—legs which kicked him mercilessly—he went his way—the way that even yet he dared not hope led to freedom. After what seemed an infinity, he found himself surrounded by comparative silence.

"Good boy," said a voice by his side.

And then he must have fainted—for he remembered nothing more.

He awoke to smell the reek of brandy in his nostrils—and to hear an urgent voice.

" You must make another effort, Tiger—we are not out of the wood yet by any means. I was able to put the whole of their damned electricity plant out of action, but they will know the run of these confounded passages far better than we do, and . . . By God ! There they are at the end of this tunnel, and they're firing at us ! "

It was true. The sudden spurts of flame that could be seen only a dozen yards or so ahead were followed by the sound of revolver bullets spattering against the earth to the right and left of them.

Then a tragic whisper :

" We're done ! I dropped my gun back there ! . . . Hell ! they've got me ! " followed by a groan. The dark form in front of him collapsed in a heap.

Out of the mist of the inferno through which he had just passed there came to Standish something definitely clear. His brain, useless before, now reacted to this fresh disaster like a well-functioning machine. It told him he had a job to do—and he must do it.

There were two parts to that job. The first resolved itself into saving the man who, like a genie in a fairy story, had come to rescue him from a death too terrible to be imagined, whilst the other consisted of getting clear of this damnable man-trap.

Picking up the limp form in front of him Standish flung it over his shoulder.

" Save yourself," came the whisper.

Tiger had no time to reply, for the horde was now on him. Thinking, no doubt, that they had killed both the fugitives, they ceased firing and rushed ahead to make certain.

The foremost had a shock. They found themselves being battered by something that seemed made of solid steel—something which worked like

a fast-moving piston and which carried a strength behind it that was devastating.

The leaders fell back, carrying in the darkness those who followed after. The floor of the tunnel was covered with the bodies over which the one-armed battler strode like an awful vengeance come to life. Every few seconds his fist shot out again—and wherever it landed it claimed a fresh victim. It was bizarre, fantastic, incredible—and glorious. Such a moment comes to only a few men in this present age. Tiger Standish, thrusting his way to liberty, felt—and acted—like a god.

Of course, it could not last—it was far too good to continue. After struggling free from the last of his enemies, having stormed a passage that seemed impossible, he felt himself falling into a velvety space that had no bottom—and, as he fell, the second miracle happened that night.

“Bellamy! Bellamy, where are you?” called a voice in French. “It’s de Chauny!”

And then oblivion overwhelmed him.

CHAPTER XXXII

PARIS IS THRILLED

This time when he awoke it was to the sight of a well-appointed bedroom and not of an underground inferno. A woman was bending over him—a woman with a very beautiful face.

" You are awake ! " he heard her say delightedly.

He put up a hand to rub his eyes. Apart from a little stiffness, he felt so luxuriously, so triumphantly comfortable, that he imagined he must have arrived at Paradise before his time.

" Where are your wings, angel ? " he inquired.

" Wings ? " said the Beautiful One—and now despair had taken the place of her former delight.

" Well, this is heaven, isn't it ? " he said quite seriously.

" Heaven—yes," answered a choking voice ; and then he was able to see that this woman with the beautiful face, who had been bending over him so solicitously, was not a nurse but—his wife.

" Sonia ! " He almost leapt out of bed at her.

" Tiger, darling ! " she cried. " Oh, Tiger, darling ! "

" That's right," he repeated ; " I'm Tiger all right, even if I'm not so sure about deserving the ' darling.' Where am I—and what's the time ? "

" You're in a nursing home—and I have the room next door." After that, her voice showing she was a little aggrieved : " What on earth does it matter about the time ? "

He ran the fingers of a much-bandaged right hand through his thick, crisp hair.

"I seem to have things all messed up—but wasn't I down to play football somewhere or other at some place——?" He broke off, his mind evidently still confused.

"Yes, Tiger, you were—but that is out of the question now. You don't seem to understand what has happened. You were brought here by a Mr. de Chauny——"

"*Monsieur* de Chauny, sweetheart," he corrected her with a smile that tore at her heart. "Better give these French blokes their proper titles, or there'll be another war. De Chauny!" he repeated to himself, as though endeavouring to bring back some sense into that thick skull of his. "De Chauny . . ."

"Don't you remember, darling?" his wife asked him. "You and that terrible man, Sir Harker Bellamy, had got into an awful jam in a house out at Billancourt. De Chauny rescued you both just in time. You were delirious, and when they brought you back to the hotel I insisted on your going straight to the best nursing home. You were unconscious——"

"My sweet," he interjected, "tell me one thing: how long have I been—er—asleep?"

"Thirty-six hours, darling." She might have added that she had not left the bedside during the whole of that time, except to talk to the nurse or doctor.

"Thirty-six hours! Smoking haddock! What time is it now, then?"

"It's twelve o'clock."

"But the day, child—the *day*?"

"It's Sunday, Tiger."

"Sunday!" Then the clouds cleared away and everything became extraordinarily clear. "The

day of the match—the match against France ! What the hell—I mean, what the deuce am I doing here, messing about in a nursing home, when I ought to be with the rest of the team ? ” His conscience at last was working overtime and giving him some awful pangs.

She tried to quieten him, her arms around his neck.

“ You must be sensible, Tiger—you mustn’t excite yourself. The doctor said so.”

“ Doctor ? What doctor ? ”

“ Dr. Lebrun.”

“ Never heard of him. What’s he doing here, anyway ? ”

“ Oh, Tiger, why can’t I make you understand ? ” she pleaded. “ Dr. Lebrun is the doctor in charge of you.”

“ I don’t want to be in charge of anybody. I feel as fit as a fiddle. But first of all, let’s get this thing straight : tell me about yourself. How did you come to get here ? ”

Although it was so difficult she schooled herself to be patient.

“ You received my letter, surely, telling you I was coming to Paris in time for the match ? ”

“ Yes. I remember that.”

“ Well, I crossed sooner than I had expected, but when I got to the hotel I found Benny in a terrible state. He was frightfully worried about you—you’d disappeared without telling him where you’d gone, and when you didn’t come back that night . . . oh, Tiger, you must give up this terrible work of yours ; if you don’t, it will be the death of me. And—oh, yes—Benny told me a woman called —a woman who said she was a friend of mine—a very beautiful woman. . . . ”

" You needn't worry about her, sweet—that was Elsa Brendt, and she is dead."

" Dead ! " she repeated in an awe-stricken tone. " And so might you have been."

" Tut tut ! " he gently chided. " That's enough of that. Of course, if it hadn't been for that stout fellow Christophe—I say," sitting up straight, " where's Bellamy ? "

" Bellamy ? " she repeated the name with scorn. " I think he ought to be horsewhipped for dragging you into such a mess."

" Never mind that now, bright-eyes—where is he ? "

" He is in Room 27."

" What ? Old B. in this nursing home ? Well, I'm damned ! I'll bet he's giving the doctors hell and Maria ! "

This was too much even for the aggrieved wife. Sonia smiled.

" The last I heard was that they had had to lock him in his room," she said.

There was a knock on the door.

" That must be the doctor," she whispered. " Now be a good boy, Tiger, and don't become difficult."

He smiled so sweetly at her that she knew he was hatching some further mischief. But nothing happened until the medical man tiptoed softly to the bed.

" And how is the patient ? " he asked in the bedside manner which had brought him a considerable fortune at the age of forty.

Tiger looked up, to see first a square-shaped black beard, surmounted by fugitive glimpses of pink flesh and a pair of very shining eyes.

" *Où est la plume de ma tante ?* " he burbled.

" Ma foi ! He is still delirious, madame. But you

must not despair," as the woman he had so ardently admired from the first moment of meeting sighed hopelessly. "It may take time, but I will get him right for you."

"Right? I'm right now. Look!" Before the astounded doctor could put forth a restraining arm, his patient had leapt out of bed and, in the confined space available was performing a series of bewildering handsprings. Truth to tell, Tiger, in his overwhelming happiness at being still alive, told himself he had never felt so amazingly fit!

"But this is madness! Please get back to bed immediately. Your shoulder—!"

"What's the matter with my shoulder?"

"You were shot, monsieur!"

"Merely a graze! Nothing to get excited about."

"You must get back to bed!"

"Not on your life!" the bearded *médecin* was assured. "The football match against France starts at half-past two to-day—and I've simply got to be there. Sonia, my clothes!"

At the quiet hotel off the main boulevard where the English Football Association had made their headquarters, consternation still prevailed. This was an entirely unprecedented situation and opinion was divided as to the correct thing to do. On the one hand, never in the annals of the game had it been known for an English centre-forward to leave a bed in a nursing home to go straight on to the field of play—and yet, this was the information which had been telephoned in Tiger Standish's own voice only five minutes before—whilst, on the other hand, no one knew better than these quidnuncs of the game that the greatest International match of the year apart from the game with Scotland, of course,

would be robbed of at least half of its interest if the most famous amateur player in the game did not turn out.

Already all Paris was talking of the "amazing exploits," as the newspapers had said, of the leader of the English attack. The keen-nosed sleuths of the popular press, as the result of snooping round, had learned that the real reason why the centre-forward of the English team had not shown up with the rest of the eleven was that he had been engaged in a private adventure. With the true Latin mind, some at least of the writers had assumed that "*cherchez la femme*" provided the explanation, but it was not until they had cornered Sonia Standish and badgered her almost beyond endurance with their innuendoes that the truth, hitherto so carefully guarded, emerged.

And then, what a sensation was caused ! It chanced that France, having yet another Pact in view, was particularly pleased with the country it had so often termed perfidious and smugly hypocritical just about now, and when the aforementioned sleuths discovered that the most famous amateur player of football was also a British Secret Service "ace"—*whoopie !*

Piece by piece, and bit by bit, the whole story came out : Tiger Standish had crossed to France not merely to play centre-forward for the British team, but far more important!—to frustrate and confound the enemies of *la patrie* ! *Vive le Standish !* All Paris, when it read the dramatic announcement (dragged very reluctantly from Sonia, let it be added) felt like rushing out and flinging its myriad arms around the so gallant Englishman's neck. The French, as you know, are like that. . . .

There was one snag : the trouble, of course, was

that no one knew where the hero could be found. At the time she was being pestered by the interviewers, who simply would not be put off, Sonia had not the slightest notion in which particular den of iniquity her husband might be discovered. Bannister (destined to achieve a fleeting immortality as a "rustic Sancho left behind by a cruel Fate and a considerate master"—for so one imaginative Parisian journalist had described the rueful Benny) was in no better case, and at length—with the help of considerable profanity, let it be added—he convinced the importunate scribes that this was the truth.

It was whilst they were struggling with this dilemma that one bright lad bethought him of de Chauny, the head of the *Illème Bureau* of the French Counter-Espionage Service. The facts seemed to hang together—this brave *Anglais* fighting the enemies of France would surely be in touch with de Chauny, the man who spent sleepless nights and watchful days counteracting the sinister moves of a relentless enemy, even now preparing for the day when she would be ready to strike again.

So to de Chauny the horde went—only to be informed that the watchdog was not available. Urged to open up still further, the official ~~on~~ duty admitted that his superior was "out on a job" and that he had taken a considerable force with him. As the time was now approaching midnight, the news aroused the journalists to unexampled heights of importunity.

With this result: whilst Tiger Standish, the particular shining hero and perfect knight of the episode, was lying unconscious in the Paris nursing home (with his wife keeping jealous guard over him), the boulevards were ablaze with talk. With char-

acteristic Gallic enthusiasm the excited gossipers declared that "*l'affaire Standish*" was the greatest episode in the whole history of the Entente Cordiale—past, present and to come.

And, incidentally, countless thousands more swore to be present at the match that Sunday afternoon.

Tiger had got to the trousers stage in his dressing when a visitor was announced. Dr. Lebrun had already retired in utmost confusion, and Sonia herself did not know whether to laugh, cry or to attempt a complete set of hysterics—not that the latter had ever been in her line. She knew, of course, that the man she had married possessed a constitution so remarkably sound that any doctor might be excused for being confounded—but for Tiger to rise from a sick-bed to go on to a football field, there to take part in an International match which even the most sedate commentators had prophesied would be contested—at least on the French team's part—with "considerable vigour," was, to her way of thinking, utterly preposterous. Still, there her darling was, pulling on his trousers as though he hadn't a care in the world, and whistling so unmelodiously that she knew from experience he was fairly bubbling with excitement inside. . . .

"Say, my sweet, that I can't see any one—that I've only got half my trousers on," Tiger replied, when the news was conveyed by means of the telephone that stood by the side of the bed. "What the——?" he exclaimed, when, following immediately upon this dictum, the door was burst open and a man, hands outstretched in vociferous greeting, strode excitedly into the room.

"*Mon vieux*, I salute you!" this intruder cried, and, what was more, he lived up to his words.

Sonia collapsed on the bed. Her composure had given way at last: the spectacie of Tiger staring at the speaker whilst the trousers which he had been so carefully adjusting fell back on to his ankles, caused peal after peal of laughter to come from her lips.

Having recovered from his congratulator's embraces, Standish retrieved his bags.

"Just a moment, if you don't mind," he said, pulling the braces over his shoulders. "Oh, by the way, this is my wife," motioning to the back of him. "I've tried for years to stop her laughing at the most inconvenient and embarrassing moments, but, as you can see for yourself, it's no good."

"Madame!" exclaimed the visitor, bowing.

"Monsieur!"

Determined to retrieve as much as possible of her ruined reputation, Sonia rose and walked towards the visitor.

"I'm most awfully sorry," she explained, "but I've been under rather a strain lately and I'm afraid I was a little hysterical."

"Madame Standish," retorted the Frenchman, "I was wholly to blame. But I could not wait a moment longer: whether your husband had his trousers on or not"—the grey eyes twinkling—"I had to burst in to give M. Standish, my courageous colleague, the congratulations and thanks of the whole French nation from M. le Président down to the humblest crossing-sweeper."

Tiger, busy now with coliar and tie, looked across.

"I don't quite get that," he remarked; and then, as light dawned: "Oh, you're de Chauny of the *Illème Bureau*! Sorry!"

"Who did you think I was?" inquired the other.

"God knows—I mean, I hadn't the slightest

idea. Damned ignorant of me, but there it is. I say, now that you're here, though, I should rather like to know how you rumbled that château place out at Billancourt. It seems to me that you saved old Bellamy's life as well as mine—at least, you did as near as damn it. Bellamy's also taking a rest cure in this crib; did you know? What's his phone—I mean his room number, darling?"

"Twenty-seven."

De Chauny acknowledged the information with another bow towards Sonia.

"I am grateful, Madame, but M. Bellamy can wait."

Tiger stared.

"What! Aren't you afraid he'll snuff it?"

"'Snuff it'?" The Frenchman looked inquiringly at Sonia.

"My husband means, aren't you afraid that Monsieur Bellamy will die?"

"Pardon! No, I am not at all anxious concerning my illustrious *confrère*," and he laughed.

"Neither am I," confessed Tiger, "but I thought it only decent to put it that way. Old B. has far too tough a hide to fade away yet awhile. Besides," smiling across at Sonia, "if he had been in a really bad way my wife would have told me."

Without waiting for the Frenchman to make any further comment on the subject, he took de Chauny firmly by the shoulders and forced him into a chair.

"I'm on my way to a football match—a previous engagement—so I haven't a great deal of time to spare, but I must confess I'm rather curious to know how you managed to play the ace out at friend Ritter's circus at Billancourt last—whenever it was."

De Chauny's face puckered itself into a look of

utmost amazement. Without replying to the question, he looked at Sonia.

"Is it true, madame, what he says?—is your husband really going to play football this afternoon?"

"I am afraid so," was the reply.

"*C'est magnifique!*" he exclaimed, looking at Tiger as though he could scarcely credit he was human.

Then, sobering, he gave Standish his full attention.

"It was the traitor in my Department——"

"Lecoitre. I didn't like the fellow—he talked too much."

"Exactly," supported de Chauny in a chilled steel tone. "Lecoitre talked too much. When I discovered his treachery I gave him the chance to commit suicide by shooting himself. But, being a coward, he postponed the event—and during the interval he, what you say, 'spilled the beans,' *n'est-ce pas?* "

"'Spilled the beans' is O.K. So he gave you the works, did he, about pal Adolf Ritter's hang-out? Bit of luck for me, eh, darling?"

De Chauny looked freshly perplexed.

"'Gave me the works'?" he repeated.

Sonia stepped into the breach.

"My husband is a tremendous cinema-goer," she started to explain, "and when he becomes excited he uses the speech of the fifth-rate films. It is regrettable—especially as," with a quick glance at Tiger, "he very often confuses his idioms. For instance, when he made that remark just now about the man you mentioned 'giving you the works' he was entirely wrong."

"Eh? What's this?" demanded Standish.

"Entirely wrong," repeated his wife. "Giving

the works' in current American screen slang means shooting a person dead. However, M. de Chauny, no doubt, has got your meaning by this time; what my husband meant to say," she went on, " was that Lecoitre told you all he knew."

The Frenchman nodded.

" He told us all we wanted to know about the Château Saint-Ange at Billancourt," he said. " The reason the traitor did not make his confession before was because he was hoping to save himself by playing the rat in a different version. However, we arrived —as you know, M. Standish—in time."

" Get any other luck ? "

" We were singularly fortunate. Apart from being able to save you and M. Bellamy from a"—he coughed, remembering the presence of Sonia—" somewhat embarrassing position, we rounded up the entire gang of the Schakalbande and discovered in the old laboratory (where you had been imprisoned) a huge safe, the doors of which had been fitted with electrically-controlled combinations, that contained an amazing number of stolen documents. It was a great haul, *mon vieux*, for there were papers and plans there which were of the utmost importance to the future serenity of both our countries."

" Good egg ! " commented his listener, " and now, although I'd like to stay and hear some more, I really must be off. . . . I say, what about having a bite of dinner with us to-night and bring old B. with you—if he's well enough ? "

De Chauny bowed.

" I shall be enchanted," he replied, " and so, I know, will ' old B. ' "

CHAPTER XXXIII

BELLAMY—AS USUAL—HAS THE LAST WORD

THE hero of that afternoon's international football match — France *v.* England — scowled good-humouredly as Sir Harker Bellamy limped into the room.

"Here comes the Ogre, darling," he remarked to Sonia, who, rising with him, still kept a firm hold on her beloved husband's left arm.

The chief of Q.1 gave Sonia a little bow.

"Very glad to see you again, my dear."

"And I'm very glad to see Tiger, too, Sir Harker," she returned with some spirit.

"Tut-tut!" remarked the Secret Service Chief, with one of his rare evidences of humour. "Everything has come out all right, so why should you worry?"

"I'm not worrying — now. But I do think that——"

"Sonia, my darling," interrupted Tiger, "the Ogre has come here to tell us his piece, and neither of us must interrupt." Under the persuasion of the kiss he gave her, she allowed herself to subside back in the chair.

"Well, there's one thing I *must* know," continued Stanhope, when the visitor had been provided with a tall glass. "How the deuce did you get to Billancourt that night?"

"The worst of me," mused Bellamy, as though speaking to himself, "is that I *will* take chances. But they always seem to come off, so——"

"One day, my lad," returned the centre-forward who, with only two minutes to spare, had scored the winning goal for England that day, "you will take one chance too many."

"Perhaps I shall. But, anyway, this one came off—and it was a very long shot, too. Suppose I start from the moment that I dictated the letter which reached you *via* the Imperial Airways *Heracles*?" he suggested.

— "Yes, that would be a very good point. From that moment until you showed up so unexpectedly, wearing the mournful countenance and shabby habiliments of the deaf-mute Christophe, just when things were getting quite warmish in the House of the Jackals—oh, it's all right, darling," Tiger continued, putting his arm round the girl, who was shuddering at his words; "it's all been a game—even if a pretty grim one."

Bellamy, emptying half his glass, disregarded this piece of affectionate side-play.

"I had been doing some work on my own—in London," he started. "It really began when I paid a call on our friend Voltag. Pity about Voltag," he broke off. "Obsessed by his sense of failure—and afraid of what would happen to him once he was released from Brixton Prison, he hanged himself with his own braces. The trouble with Emil Voltag was that he was never really up to his job—which, between ourselves, was a pretty big one. However—" and the speaker finished his task of emptying the tall glass.

"Now I'll get straight on," he promised. "I went to Voltag at that Kensington house, the secret of which he so confidently believed no one outside his own circle was aware of, and put the wind up him properly. To begin with, I told him that I knew

all about his entering the country through a forged passport, and that by this he had rendered himself liable to a charge under the Aliens Act. The second thing I told him was that I knew all about the arrival in England of a gentlemanly assassin named 'Coke' Mahon . . . 'But,' catching sight of Sonia's twitching face, "I'll tell you about him a little later on.

"The third piece of information I passed on to Voltag consisted of the suggestion that Voltag might be 'removed' by the Elsa Brendt woman, who was intimately concerned with the Schakalbande. He wouldn't credit the news—or, rather, he didn't want to believe it—but I think I persuaded him in the end. He pretended not to know anything about it, although he admitted that he had heard of it. . . ."

At the memory Bellamy chuckled.

"Wait a minute," interjected Standish. "Before we go any further, I should like to be informed how you got to hear of the Jackals?"

"Through Elsa Brendt."

"Through Elsa Brendt?"

Bellamy chuckled again.

"Elsa was a good agent, but she had her limitations. One was due to the fact that she had a decidedly vicious side. It was this desire to descend to the depths now and again that caused her, no doubt, to visit the worst dens of Soho whilst she was in London. At one of the café bars one night she got into conversation with a man she endeavoured to interest in the Ritter organisation. It is only fair to her to say that she was distinctly under the influence of drink at the time, and, I shrewdly suspect, a little dope as well—"

"How horrible!" exclaimed Sonia.

"Yes, my dear, horrible, as you say—but that is human nature as we know it in the Secret Service," replied Bellamy.

Standish impatiently thrust aside the non-essentials.

"What happened in that *café bar*?"

"She talked to Dunlop, whom I had instructed to 'trail' her. You see, I had had suspicions for some time that the fair Elsa was connected with the Jackals, at the head of which was Ritter, and whilst you were busy in other directions I put Dunlop on to her. As you know, he's a good boy, and he got just what I wanted."

"What did he get?"

"An invitation to join the Schakalbande. He posed as a discredited member of our own intelligence—and Elsa (remember, Dunlop is rather good-looking!) lapped it up.

"The story that Dunlop told me afterwards was quite entertaining. Apparently the recruiting process to the Schakalbande was extremely dramatic—or melodramatic, whichever way you may like to look at it. In any case, young Dunlop was duly sworn in that same night in a back room in a house in Greek Street, and he swore allegiance to his new service whilst a loaded revolver was being held by two other men to each temple. . . .

"It was at that particular point that I decided to move in the matter myself. Of course, young Dunlop was very upset—but he obeyed orders."

"Why didn't you tell me you were coming in on the same job?" questioned Tiger.

"Well," confessed Bellamy, with far more humility than was his habit, "as a matter of fact, I did originally intend to let you know, and then I decided that, working independently, we might get better

results. Of course, I should have linked up with you later."

" You linked up all right ! "

" You know what I am about these things."

" I know you're so damned secretive that you keep things even from yourself ! " cried Tiger. " But carry on."

" I came over to Paris and saw de Chauny. We had a long talk, in the course of which I decided that the man Lecoitre—you remember, the fellow who met you at the Gare du Nord ? "

" Yes, I remember him ; a smarmy swine . . . talked too much. De Chauny's told us all about him —he's dead."

" Panicked and shot himself. He was a double-crosser and deserved all he got. It was through Lecoitre that the French Government lost a complete set of the plans for the expensively devised and enormously effective fortification scheme the French Government had concentrated on since the end of the last Great War."

" Lecoitre stole them ? "

" He induced a very highly-placed official to steal them. But, like Elsa Brendt, he was not too cautious—I followed him to an Apache den just off the Rue de Rennes Montparnasse the other night, and heard him talk too freely—I seem to remember, Tiger, that you made that criticism of the fellow just now—and I got word through to de Chauny. As it happened, de Chauny was already very suspicious of the fellow—and what I told him provided the last straw. It was an amusing experience that night," mused Bellamy. " By the way, you were somewhat lucky in escaping from Pepin the Wolf——"

" Who the hell is Pepin the Wolf ? "

" Don't you remember being asked by a man

for a match in a lonely part of Paris the other night?"

"Yes, of course—and if it hadn't been for young Archie Sidebotham I might—but what's that got to do with Lecoître?"

Bellamy spoke like a schoolmaster addressing a backward pupil.

"The man who asked you for the match was a notorious Apache leader named Pepin the Wolf. He had been commissioned by Ritter through an intermediary to kidnap you and keep you a prisoner. But plans miscarried—or you wouldn't be here now. Anyway, when Ritter and Elsa Brendt, in company with the same intermediary, went to Montparnasse to demand an explanation from Pepin the Wolf, the latter got annoyed with Ritter's manner and became attracted by Elsa's charms. The two would have proved such a powerful combination that I might have been relieved of the task of seeing to the leaders of the Jackals, if Lecoître, who had a close connection with the underworld—it was through these means that he disposed of his traitorous spoils—hadn't arrived to save both their lives. Now you've heard the whole story."

"Oh, no, I haven't—there's a hell of a lot more to tell. What brought you to the Château Saint-Ange dressed up as Christophe, the deaf-mute?"

Bellamy smiled.

"That really belongs to the second instalment of the serial," he said.

"All right, let's have it," encouraged Tiger.

"The Mole" took a long pull at the cigar he had just lit.

"I want you to understand that it was with no idea in my mind of disparaging your own efforts at the headquarters of the Schakalbande that I decided to take a look-see myself. These old bones,"

stretching himself—"well, vanity occasionally prompts me to see how old they actually are. Anyway, when I heard through de Chauny that Gaston Coret's 'familiar' at the Château Saint-Ange was a deaf and dumb gardener named Christophe, the thought came into my mind that it would not be such a bad idea if I took Christophe's place for a while. Of course," with an impish grin that might have belonged to a mischievous schoolboy, "the notion was entirely unorthodox—but there it was. Anyway, luck played into my hands: on the way out to the Château Saint-Ange what should my car pass but a derelict motor-cab containing the very person himself—Christophe, no less. It took a good deal of persuasion, I can tell you, to convince this unfortunate that he was in the hands of friends instead of enemies. Getting back to Paris, I got de Chauny's chief disguising artist to work on me—that's the best of being a small man—and well, you know the rest."

"You might have given me some tip," complained Stanish.

"I had no time. The thing came as a genuine inspiration. Of course, I could have taken some of de Chauny's men out to the place and raided it—but that was not what I wanted. Positive proof was what I was after. Besides, after the Lecoifre affair, I did not know who could or could not be trusted. And also, as you are aware, in a case of this kind I like to play a lone hand. I like to think myself something of an artist in certain directions; and if I ~~had~~ asked de Chauny for the loan of some men, it would have meant a good deal of tedious explanation, and the Chief of the *Illème Bureau* would have collared the credit. Not that I am of an envious nature, as you know, my young friend."

You're the most conceited blighter I've ever met, Bellamy," retorted Standish, "but we'll leave that."

"I've got to hand it to Ritter," continued "The Mole," after a pause. "That fellow had a genius for organisation, and within a very short time he had built up what was practically a world-wide agency for the purchase and disposal of international secrets. He recruited mainly amongst disgruntled and renegade agents of all nationalities. In many instances de Chauny and I have been able to discover, from the documents found at the Château Saint-Ange, members of his Schakalbande were still serving in the Secret Services of their own countries. Ritter induced the men and women under him to take tremendous risks—but he paid them on a corresponding scale, and the profits derived from this international exchange and mart of information and secrets of a military and political nature were split amongst the gang on a community basis. Recruitment of new agents was carried out on a carefully devised procedure—namely, an agent known to be operating for the Secret Service of a country was discreetly approached and subsequently received an invitation to throw in his lot with the Jackals. Should he—or she—be inquisitive enough to ask for further particulars with regard to the objects of the new organisation, such details were given (after, of course, the fullest investigations had been made about the recruit)—but from this stage in the proceedings no man or woman who entered the Schakalbande was permitted to retract: he either consented to become a member of the band, or he was scuppered!"

"What about Dunlop?"

"He was prepared," said Bellamy significantly.

" Well," rising and flinging the stub of his cigar into the grate, " I think that's all."

Tiger grinned satirically.

" So I'm free to go home now ? "

" Whether he's free or not, he's *going* home," put in Sonia.

" Of course," murmured " The Mole," " he's perfectly free to do anything he likes—until I want him again," he continued under his breath.

" What are you burbling about, B. ? " inquired Tiger.

The words were so much smoke-barrage. He had caught the look in " The Mole's " eyes and knew what it meant.

THE END

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